

DANDELION DAYS

HENRY WILLIAMSON





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DANDELION DAYS

THE BEAUTIFUL YEARS

BY

HENRY WILLIAMSON

Some Opinions.

A. de S. in *The Manchester Guardian*.—"There is in it an absolute candour which is truly spontaneous, and not due, as in other more sophisticated novelists, to the missionary desire of writing more frankly about love than other writers have done. . . . The love story of Jim Holloman and the orphan Dolly is one of the most beautiful to be read in recent fiction. . . . This blessed spontaneity has produced pages in Mr. Williamson's book of such moving poetry that the reader instinctively turns back to them when the book reaches its end."

The Times Literary Supplement.—"One feels that it is a labour of love . . . inspired in the first instance by a grateful desire to record certain impressions drawn from his evidently close and sympathetic association with the English countryside."

The English Review.—"Mr. Williamson's countryside lives and breathes, under sun and stars, a world full of poignant joy and cruel sorrow. Richard Jefferies is, no doubt, his model in many ways, and there is in his poetic humanity a tinge of Hardy's magic, but he is no mere imitator of the great, but soundly individual, with a sweet savour of his own."

Buxton Advertiser.—"A beautiful story, both in conception and execution. Mr. Williamson has an almost uncanny understanding of the nature of the two youngsters he depicts. . . . A book of rare simplicity and deep insight."

Yorkshire Observer.—"One may hope that this book, while certainly not written for children, may awake in parents and guardians more lively consciousness of what childhood means and craves."

Birmingham Post.—"The toughened reviewer smiles a grim smile as he begins to turn the pages. The meandering narration, the callow psychology, the slightness of plot, cause him to picture the author as the conventional poet, wandering, unpractically-minded, in wood and sunny field. But very soon the reviewer finds himself and his hard-won notions lost and confounded. . . . Mr. Williamson has the gift which justifies abrogation of many canons of art. . . . He makes us impulsively and repeatedly glad because of the beauty of the things of the earth."

Patrick Terry in *The Bristol Times and Mirror*.—"Mr. Williamson shows a great deal of Jefferies' ability. He has lighted on the perfect phrasing of the poet."

William Kean Seymour in *The Evening Standard*.—"A very pleasing and in many ways original treatment of childhood in fiction. . . . Will be good reading for the most blasé library subscriber."

S. P. B. Mais in *The Daily Express*.—"A first novel of quite unusual distinction and beauty, stamping its author as a true poet of nature."

The Scotsman.—"Mr. Williamson has the soul of a poet who sees what is beautiful and pure in life, and makes others see it too. Jim and Dolly are a second pair of 'Forest Lovers.'"

Glasgow Evening News.—"So exquisite is the author's enthusiasm that one feels almost the lyric effect of a Masfield poem."

The Weekly Dispatch.—"Real literature."

The Spectator.—"Memorable."

The Saturday Review.—"Mr. Williamson is a writer who is worth taking seriously."

Sir William Beach Thomas.—"A very good book, full of insight and real sympathy with the nature of boys and those superior animals, the birds."

The Nottingham Guardian.—"Richard Jefferies might have told it."

The Pall Mall Gazette and Globe.—"Mr. Williamson has great understanding of children."

Red Tape.—"We cannot honestly join in the chorus of approbation."

DANDELION DAYS

by

HENRY WILLIAMSON

Author of The Beautiful Years and The Lone Swallows.

“I hope in the days to come future thinkers will unlearn us, and find ideas infinitely better . . . let us get a little alchemy out of the dandelions.”

Richard Jefferies in *Nature and Books*.



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EPISTLE APOLOGICAL TO MR. DAKERS

My Dear Dakers,—For some time past I have been undecided whether to let you see this letter before you read the tale. My original intention was to attach it to the end of the story, lest its presence at the beginning might deter you from reading the book. Upon reflection, however, I have decided to be honest with you, to put my faith in your patience.

You may remember myself coming to see you, a year after the end of the war, with the manuscript of a book hidden in an old army blanket. The blanket was not recognisable as such, since with considerable skill I had fashioned an overcoat from it; the script I had written during three weeks of "fierce mid-nights and famishing morrows," following an almost intolerable pain. Nevertheless, you managed to read approximately 100,000 words of my tale. The kindly encouragement you gave me, the hopes you aroused, and most of all, your friendship, were directly responsible for my eventual retirement to the remote country, there to devote all my time and energy to the recasting of my whole scheme and the selection of characters and episodes that would bear their part in its presentation. I realised many things: that I might have to starve; that most things that make youth enjoyable I must forgo. (However, I made some good friends in Devon, so I did not mind having but one meal a day). It was borne upon me that one volume could not possibly contain all I had to say, unless that volume were as big as the post-war "Who's Who," and rivalry with such an immense work of fiction would be both fatuous and foolish. But we have discussed this on many occasions, and as you must be weary of it, I will not exhaust you with further reminiscence.

Willie Maddison, I imagine, is nearly eighteen years of age when he stands at the eastern edge of the spinney and bids farewell to the fields and the trees which he has known for so long. Two books have been written about him; and he is not yet

eighteen. To you this may seem excessive, for it may be contended that his character has yet to be formed ; he knows nothing of the world, nothing of love, nothing of the ways of real people, unless one is tolerant and will allow that " a few yokels and scenes of hamlet-life," a few schoolmasters and education at a very minor public school, might have some connection with real life. But my personal conviction is that the character of Willie Maddison is entirely decided. Nothing that happens afterwards will alter permanently that character. How it has been decided, you will read, I trust. How valuable have been the lessons at Colham Grammar School, situate in the West Country, you must estimate for yourself ; you must contrast the value of what is learned in the muggy atmosphere of the class-room with the value of sweet and lovely things seen in the countryside. It is to show this contrast, to exemplify it dispassionately and with truth, that I have written the book. The irony of the relationship between the immature Willie and the mature Mr. Rore will be, I expect, apparent to you.

In your estimation of comparative values, I would warn you not to attribute too much importance to the different schoolmasters in the book. Really, they are not of the slightest importance. Like the boys, they are nearly all illaquetted in a wretched and false instructional system, and it is this instructional system that I would like to see considerably altered. Do not misunderstand me. I have no nihilistic tendencies towards schools. I do not intend, in my third volume, to make Willie Maddison lead a punitive expedition against Colham Grammar School in order to burn it down, for that would be decidedly disastrous ; nor do I intend to make it a cinematographical palace, for that would be indubitably catastrophic. Rather, I would have these schoolmaster-characters regarded with compassion. For years (your imagination will tell you) they have had to bear with numberless naughty boys, insolent boys, deceitful boys, dull boys, clever boys, industrious boys, and boys like Willie Maddison. They are not super-men : they too have been in boyhood the victims of a harmful method of education, and they are " paying the price " : when they were young, when their brains were plastic and eager to absorb knowledge, they too were stamped by obsolete dies, their subconscious minds

filled with useless impressions, their conscious minds overworked and distressed. But, you may say, their subconscious minds will have obliterated the die-stamps: school will be a pleasant memory: fundamental character will be manifest: those who were born black sheep will be black sheep, and conversely. Heredity predominates, you may argue; and we shall be in agreement over that. But surely it is time seriously to consider a method that shall solve in boyhood, as an acid dissolves metal, the tragic loadings of heredity? For from these spring intolerances, un-understandings, miseries—and needless tragedy.

Let me illustrate this idea by a personal memory. Some years ago I wandered over the slope of a green hill, whose loveliness was marred by rusting wire, gaping holes, and dead men, most of them youths, and all of them lying in piteous attitude in the sunshine of that May evening. A red dust floated above a valley village three hundred yards away, for the Germans were "plastering" forsaken Croiselles. The men on the hill had been killed at dawn that morning; there were Frenchmen, Englishmen, Americans, and Germans. All of them, I imagined, were simple men who either had been happy or were dreaming of happiness. Now, they were dead. None of them had desired death; they had wanted to live, to love and to be loved, to have children, and to see them happy. To be, in other words, like the wild things of the earth—the lark that even then was singing over the red dust-cloud, the bee at the hawthorn blossom, and myself, a living creature with a brain that placed him infinitely above the lark and the bee.

Why must these things be, I wondered, with pain. For I knew how the human heart yearned for goodness and for beauty; I knew that nearly every human being loathed war, and yet, how they were dying! My heart was sick, not for myself, but for the needlessness of tragedy—personal tragedy, national tragedy, world tragedy. Later, came the Russian revolution, and it was borne upon me that any sudden mass change was not the way I groped for. Then one night in London everything seemed clear to me, and I wondered how I could best make it clear to others. I had been reading that glorious record of an individual man's thought, "The Story of my Heart," and suddenly it

seemed to me that my own thought was fused with that of Richard Jefferies. I conceived the character of William Maddison, and wrote, as you may remember, a book that I called "*The Flax of Dream*." But I was not satisfied, and after a few months it appeared to be imperfect in every way, so I cast it, deciding to wait until I had a more mature knowledge of my materials.

You have read "*The Beautiful Years*," and here is Book II., and with it the boyhood of Willie definitely terminates. He is leaving for London; the month is July, and the year is nineteen-fourteen. Do not be apprehensive that in the next volume, "*The Dream of Fair Women*" (a title adapted from Chaucer, and used since by some one else, I believe), you will have to read entirely about religion and undergraduates, journeys to Spain and to "underworld" beer-halls, ladies imperfectly painted and titubating gentlemen. Nor will I use as a background in that volume the war of 1914-1918; because it is not necessary for my major theme. No. The action of Book III. begins during May, 1919, in a hamlet on the coast of North Devon, and is chiefly a record of illusion, which must come before Book IV., the concluding volume. In "*The Dream of Fair Women*" you will meet Eveline Fairfax, beloved of many men-friends; you will meet again Elsie Norman and her friend Mary Ogilvie; you will meet a supposedly Canadian gentleman who calls himself Captain Patrick Collyer, D.S.O. (with two bars), M.C.; you will meet Isaak, Billjohn, Hereward, Tatters, Grannie Gordangle, Jerry, Oswald, Becky, Pie, and Lord Skirr; you will meet the husband of Eveline Fairfax, and some of her men-friends—Julian Warbeck, William and Phillip Maddison, Viscount Slumbar, Aubrey de la Hay, and others; you will meet Moony Mat and Brownie, Mr. and Mrs. Yeasted, and Mrs. Heddaka; and, for a brief time, Diana Shelley and Howard.

These human, bird and animal characters, I hope, will be compensation for the absence of popular descriptions of Leicester Square (London) people and of shawl-entrapped bodies falling with a splash into the River Thames from the Embankment, or alternatively, of autobiographical chronicles of post-war life and thought and ill-breeding at Oxford University. And

while the subject of compensation is before me, I would explain that my use of usually-unworked English words in the four volumes of "*The Flax of Dream*" is prompted entirely by a desire to be precise and exact. To take one example—"umbered." Actually this word, as employed by Shakespeare, means "discovered by gleam of fire." It is a word suggesting, to me, dimness, heaviness, solemnity. It is derived from "umber," which, as you know, is an ochreous ore of iron. Had you been with me on the many occasions I have watched the rising of the moon above the Exmoor Hills, and observed the peculiar colour laid upon it by the summer vapours; had you thought for hours how to express in one sentence, so that it be vividly conveyed to the educated reader, that slow and swelled and heavy moonrise, rejecting a hundred adjectives after testing their "tone" by the mental ear; had you, in other words, been myself, you would have realised that "umbered" was the only word that could convey the spirit of the West Country moonrise in July. Jefferies said that he required a language of ideas to fully express himself; but then he was a man who would have shuddered at any expression like "the weather was beyond reproach."

Some words have a comic value. One such is used in this letter—"titubating." It has a Latin derivation, and means "stumbling"; its use occurred to me one night as I walked to Charing Cross Station with a young poet who had swallowed twenty-two pints of beer, and was continually thundering at me extracts from Swinburne's "*Poems and Ballads*."

But I am becoming garrulous, and distracting your attention and mine from the true subject of this letter to you, which is to prepare the way for some of my views which hover like watching hawks over my story. Those in the tale are not necessarily my own; they belong to the various characters; and I have tried faithfully to present every one. You may think, of course, that I have failed to show that there is any basic wrong in the present system of cramming the immature mind; on the contrary, that I have merely shown its unsuitability for one small boy. You may consider that the schoolmasters, with one or two exceptions, are preposterous figures: that they are grotesque caricatures, and overdrawn: that nobody like them could possibly be in any school; very well; my answer is that I have

tried to make them amusing to you as a reader, that I have projected them with the comic spirit in order to avoid contributing to the mass of dull and dreary school novels that, I have noticed, are clogging the shelves of your library. Realism, it seems to me, does not necessarily divagate from truth because it is presented with an effort of humour or even of beauty; the spirit of realism may exist equally in a laugh, a tear, a shudder, or a poetical image.

Accept this book, my dear Andrew, with my deep affection.

Faithfully yours,

HENRY WILLIAMSON.

18 Adam Street, W.C.

27th January, 1922.

ADDENDA

(i) *The sub-titles of the four volumes of "The Flax of Dream" are respectively: "A Tale of Childhood": "A Tale of Boyhood": "A Tale of Youth": and "A Tale of Life." In "Dandelion Days" I have omitted the sub-title, and for this reason. When "The Beautiful Years" was published, I inquired anonymously of its merits at a certain large library in Oxford Street, London, and a lady-librarian in answer to my hesitant query regretted that she could not recommend it. "It's only about a child," she said, "and will only bore you." Mayhap my appearance was as unprepossessing as that of the book's description; so by keeping away from London and by omitting the sub-title I trust I have removed two things prejudicial to your book's acceptance by a kind public.*

(ii) *Recently I received a communication from a gentleman, a schoolmaster, insisting that my "beastly book, 'The Wonderful (sic) Years,' should have been suppressed." My voluntary correspondent says that "the incident of the rescue of a shameless, naked woman by her mentally-deficient lover has no artistic justification." He further alleges that he remembers me as a "mendacious, cowardly schoolboy," who had "a most pernicious influence among his fellows."*

Of the gentleman, my voluntary correspondent, I have no remembrance. I have not replied to him. If he reads "Dandelion Days," I trust he will realise the "artistic justification" of it.

H. W.

Skirr Cottage,
7th March, 1922.

THE GARDENERS' METHODS

"There is nothing in books that touches my dandelion."

FROM *Nature and Books,*

SATURDAY MORNING IN THE HOTHOUSE

THE magnanimity of the Governors of Colham Grammar School permitted an extra quarter of an hour's study on Wednesdays and Saturdays, consequently twice a week morning school did not terminate till half-past twelve o'clock. Athleticism on those afternoons of half-holidays was encouraged, but the playing of games by every boy was not enforced with the conventional fervour of a great public school. Membership of the C.G.S.N.H.A.F.B.C.—otherwise the Colham Grammar School Natural History and Field Botanical Club—provided an alternative to the playing of games, and the rambles of this club were conducted personally by Mr. Worth, the melancholy person who taught woodwork and drawing during school hours. In giving his gracious consent to the formation of the Club, Mr. Rore, M.A., B.Sc. (Lond.), the Head Master, insisted that its members should remain together and take notes of their observations. For this reason chiefly membership of the C.G.S.N.H.A.F.B.C. was considered a poor escape from more strenuous forms of exercise, and too much like work. The club suffered from a paucity of members that was more or less permanent except for a transitory swelling at the commencement of term, when new boys were wont to join with the same spontaneity manifested by newly-hatched flies blundering into the most obvious and hoary spider's web that for ages has collected dust and moth skeletons in the corner of a potting shed.

That Saturday morning Mr. Rore had spoken briefly of the value of sport, a value that he placed high on account of its relation to work. Three hundred and fifty-seven boys out of the three hundred and fifty-nine comprising his pupilage gathered for prayers gazed at him while he looked with abstract keenness under his semi-circular glasses; three hundred and fifty-seven boys, twelve masters, and one flea-bitten cat who existed solely to eat the scraps left over from

luncheon gazed at the pink, satiny face, with its high-domed forehead and thin gray hairs ; at the drooping moustache hiding his mouth as a sluice in winter conceals the iced hatch over which it rushes ; at the broad shoulders, rounded by the gown ; at the large hands placed on the green baize table before him as his voice, incisive, terse, and resonant, urged the need of sport in order to cultivate mental power, or, as he pronounced it, " paar."

" The only thing of vaa'ue in this world is work," his voice stridulated, frightening the little boys of 2c and 2b classes huddled immediately below the dais, " and that should be every boy's effort. Mental paar ! Why"—the voice lowered as though scorning an imaginary heckler—" why, wi'out work, where would we be ? Absurd, absurd, I tell you ! All your days, boys, I urge you to cultivate that mental paar. Mind you, the brain won't keep going wi'out sport, so play hard, hard at it, all the time. Then home again, and on with marthemartics, *master* your difficulties ! *Ad astra per aspera*," he apostrophised sublimely, " only pauper spirits of papescent mentality would fail to be moved by such an immortal thought. What boys agree ? "

Like pallid spearheads their hands rose and subsided. Mr. Rore was satisfied. He paused a moment, while each of the three hundred and fifty-seven boys out of the three hundred and fifty-nine present in Hall felt himself to be personally engulfed in that serbonian glare. During his pause, and for some unaccountable reason, no one coughed, no boots shuffled, and no books fell to the floor. And in the silence that usually gloomed Colham Grammar School for the first five minutes after nine o'clock in the morning a laugh was distinctly audible. It came from the direction of little Hall guarding the door through which the masters and the porter alone were permitted to enter, and where hung the portrait of a toad-like gentleman, expelled many years before, who was now famous throughout three continents as an empire builder.

" WHO LAUGHED ? "

Mr. Rore's voice seemed to shake the fusty air of Big Hall.

"Come along, sah, come along. Maddison again! COME ALONG, SAH!! And Temperley! Late again!"

As though realising the futility of assumption that the Head Master had not noticed them, Willie with Jack following quickly behind passed up the gangway between the herded classes while the three hundred and fifty-seven boys looked furtively at them, feeling glee, delight, amusement, or sympathy, each according to his different temperament and regard for the two. Indeed one boy experienced the emotion of sorrow—Rupert Bryers, a frail-looking boy with large gray eyes, who was passionately fond of wild flowers and birds, and a great friend of Willie's. He stood beside an exceptionally tall boy called "Bony," which nickname expressed exactly his appearance. He wore glasses with steel rims; his face was white and long and gaunt, his head, with its close-cropped hair, shaped like an acorn. His ears and teeth protruded, and his shoulders appeared only a trifle broader than the width of his head and ears, so tall was he. His nose was big and bony, and as he peered over the moving heads of the boys in front of him he looked like a vulture who had lost all its feathers amongst a flock of sparrows. Suddenly he bobbed down and whispered to his other neighbour,—

"Coo, I say man, they won't half get it from the Bird." Like a merlin Mr. Rore turned.

"Come along, sah, come along! Watson, I saw your lips moving. And Fitzacher! Double, double!!"

Willie and Jack felt a great relief at the detection of some one else in culpable irregularity. It was a comfort to think that two others would be standing behind Mr. Rore with themselves.

"Pauper spirits," ejaculated the Head, with impersonal scorn. "Face the wall—and think."

Willie looked at him and felt that Mr. Rore's pale blue eyes under the semi-circular glasses went right to the back of his own head and read every thought he instinctively tried to conceal by an expression of hopelessness, as though wishing to imply that the irony of a boy's school life was too much to contend against. He wondered if the catapult

in his pocket were visible to those awful eyes ; if in his breath still lingered the smell of a Marsuma cigarette purchased from an automatic machine on Colham Railway Station ; if Mr. Rore would ask afterwards to see his homework and detect that his arithmetic was cooked. For Mr. Rore was the most devilish and terrifying person he had ever met, and one, moreover, who had frequently told him that he was the worst boy in the school.

He stared at the wall in front, wishing that he wore trousers of a stouter material. Jack glanced at him, and winked.

" Mr. Croodbrane," murmured Mr. Rore.

He addressed a heavy man sitting at the piano upon the platform beside the green baize table. In response to the signal, a series of jangling chords and discords came from the top of the piano. His playing was crude ; his fingers were too thick, his hands and nature too solid for a delicate instrument like a piano. He would have been more suited to play the musical logs that some cannibalistic and primitive South Sea tribes thump with stone hammers in order to produce harmony. Years ago when a junior master he had with inaccurate foolishness admitted to Mr. Rore that he played the pianoforte, and ever since he had been responsible for *The War March of the Priests* while the boys trooped into Hall at nine o'clock, and the melody of the Latin Hymn, composed by the late Dr. Bullnote, D.D., when they were formed up and Mr. Rore gave the signal. The piano was a strongly-built one, having been made in Germany, but even its teutonic characteristics of brute strength and bovinity had waned before the onslaught of Mr. Croodbrane. Many of the keys that he banged were mute, having passed into nothingness after continued thumping ; a few twanged among pieces of paper, old books, and orange peel thrown inside the piano alongside ancient and split gymnasium shoes ; but to the four boys standing facing the wall it seemed to rattle and groan like the wind in the bleached bones of an hyena. He played the melody once, omitting the principal notes, paused, and the whole school sang the first verse, led by Mr. Rore :—

*Lum dum dum lum lulu dum dum
Dum dum lum lum buhu bu rum
Bahu luha rumrumrum mum mum
Rum lum lum lum lum lum lum lum
Tum tum tum !*

They appeared to chant, while the face of the late Head, Dr. Bullnote, D.D., seemed to beam upon the assembly from its portrait in oils above the clock. The little boys with gentle eyes and fresh soft faces in 2c and 2b piped in thin trebles ; those in middle school sang in a falsetto bass, as though endeavouring to effect a premature break in voices that were still high ; boys with recently broken voices squeaked like bats and boomed like bitterns alternately ; the seniors made a vague lip motion, considering it undignified to sing with the rabble, while those ishmaelites of the Special Class who were leaving at the end of term sang in deliberate disharmony a rude parody.

*The Old Bird is a moulted crow
And he will reap as he does sow
His brain's gone west but he does his best
And when he dies to Hell he'll go
We hope so !*

was the morning prayer of the Specials (a class of boys considered to be certain utter failures in life, and therefore left more or less alone while supposed to be fitting themselves as future wage-earners by learning shorthand, book-keeping, business letter writing, and a curious subject known as "commercial french.")

Dr. Bullnote's hymn ended, and Mr. Rore gave the signal to Mr. Croodbrane, who produced from the piano upon those keys as yet unbroken some semblance of *The War March of the Priests* ; various masters gave their classes the orders to file away ; and morning school began.

With a sudden movement that caused his gown to swirl about him, Mr. Rore turned round and regarded the four boys who shuffled their feet and twisted their hands, and

above the noise of the boys marching away his voice rang sharp and clear.

"Well, Fitzacher, I'm sorry to see you here!"

Fitzacher looked him in the eyes, and his lips muttered.

"Can't hear! Use your lips and teeth, sah!" cried Mr. Rore, turning his head sideways and listening keenly.

Fitzacher looked away.

"Foolish boy, foolish boy!" said the Head, facing him again, and chiding with stern gravity, "to allow yourself to be distracted by a pauper-spirit! Now be off, and don't let it happen again!"

Fitzacher went.

"Watson, I've told you before! If it happens again, I shall gie you that cane! Now be off, and hard at it, hard at it. Get that mental paar."

Bony went, thumping over the hollow platform, agile as a colt with leaden legs.

"Well, sah!" to Temperley, in a flinty voice. "Why were you late?"

"If you please, Sir, the train——"

"No excuse, no excuse at all!" he bellowed. "The boy must be e giving me such an excuse! As for you, Maddison, you are incorrigible. Why were you late?"

"Please, Sir, my watch——"

"Nonsense, nonsense!" stormed the Head, "the boy's mad! You're the worst boy in the school. I'm always gieing you that cane! Be careful, sah, be careful! Always the same, a hypocritical desire to make a little look a lot! Padding your homework, sah! Come along, come along, I'll gie you that cane!!"

He swept off the platform, gown trailing behind him, head held slightly in the air, and his tall, big body moving swiftly and evenly as though floating over the floor. Willie marvelled at his power to see inside his satchel, and detect how his essay on Titus Oates was padded. Loitering boys passing through doors into class-rooms turned to stare at him as he passed down the centre of Hall, followed by Willie and Jack with palms suddenly wet and expression

upon their faces peculiar to such encounters with Mr. Rore. They followed him under the horizontal bar of the gymnasium, past the ladders enwound with the rings and ropes, and so into little Hall with its model steamship encased in glass standing upon the cold and tessellated floor.

"Come along, Temperley!" called the Head.

Willie was left waiting by the steamship, while Jack followed through the heavy mahogany door into the study. He felt the seat of his flannel trousers—they were terribly thin. He would probably get three. He stared at the ship, and then with alarm remembered the catapult: it would be sure to fall out of his pocket. Quickly and nervously, with trembling hands, he hid it in the leather satchel. While he was strapping it up he heard a chair move, the dull murmur of Mr. Rore's voice, and the sharp sound of a thwack, and silence: another thwack, the moving of a chair, another rumble of voice, a third thwack, and the chair being pushed back. The door opened and Jack came out red of face, grinning fixedly.

"Come along, sah," sounded the Head's voice impatiently from his study.

With a sickening feeling and throbbing heart he went in. Once inside Mr Rore spoke softly but concisely, as if intoning a mystical prayer.

"Come along, shan't happen again. Over—hands right over." Willie knelt over the yellow chair, and Mr. Rore lifted his coat tails. "Shan't happen again. You're always wasting my time. Now think——"

A long pause, a swish, and a sharp pain. From far away it seemed murmured the chanting voice.

"Shan't happen again. You've got to get that paar. Think—shan't happen again."

A sharper pain, just where the first stroke had been laid. Willie stopped his breath, and pressed against the chair in an effort to make rigid his whole body and so alleviate the agony. Mr. Rore hit again, unexpectedly and without his usual soft admonition to think, with the result that the air in the boy's lungs exploded violently through his mouth and the chair jarred the floor.

"One more for wriggling," chanted the schoolmaster. "Shan't occur again. Think hard now."

The boy made a small sound which Mr. Rore did not hear; a sound of a half hysterical sob. Followed what felt like the blow of a white-hot steel whip on the same place as before.

"Now go back, work hard, and don't let it occur again. Double!"

Willie opened the door, closed it behind him, trembling violently; waited a moment to blink his eyes clear, and then went into the physics laboratory, where for the first two "hours" Mr. Croodbrane instructed one-half of 4a in the principles of Electricity and Magnetism, while Mr. Waugh taught Chemistry to the other half in the laboratory across the playground.

Jack and Willie were said to be the greatest friends in the school. They went everywhere together, and Willie was the leader. Walking in the woods, silent and in Indian-fashion, he led the way. If an evening passed without seeing his friend, he was miserable. Even his intermittent melancholy over the hopeless love for Elsie Norman was dispelled when Jack was with him. They had sworn to be friends for ever and ever. Many times they had made wills in school, leaving their possessions to each other as a sign of great devotion. Were Willie caned, Jack was miserable. Were Jack "kept in" by some unsympathetic master, Willie hung about for him until release came. They made a collection of birds' eggs conjointly, and pooled all pocket money, and never wrote a letter to another boy, even a rotten cousin, without showing the letter. And in secret they admired each other, although neither would admit it, nor own up to such girlishness.

"Fall in there, you bors," said Mr. Croodbrane suddenly to the class, a minute after the second bell. "All right, lead on," staring vaguely out of the window.

"You chaps going out with Old Useless this afternoon?" asked Bony Watson as the class straggled around the Hall, thumping on the gratings whence now and again in the winter issued hot air. "Bryers'n me'r going into Brogborough Woods after a carrion crow's we suspect."

"Are you going to hop it from Useless then? He'll report you to the Bird."

"I shall plead a headache," grinned Bony.

"I had one last week," said Willie. "So did Temperley. Besides, we've got tons of carrion crow's eggs. Haven't we, man?"

"Hundreds!"

"Lucky dogs," croaked Watson.

"We've got a couple of cuckoos, haven't we, Bony?" reminded Rupert.

"You've guessed my secret," said Bony.

Doors were opening and streams of boys emerging; boys with satchels slung over shoulders, boys with books held by straps; boys in breeches and trousers, flannel collars and eton collars, serge suits and tweed suits; smooth hair, short cropped hair, hair like dry seaweed over collars; a few polls greased, but the majority frowsy and tousled. They slouched over the iron grating, stamping, some sliding; a confused hum filled the Hall. The big youths of the Special Class, sitting permanently at the dark-brown desks in Hall, stared at them idly, glad to have something to distract their attention. Masters passed through open doors while the incoming classes filed into the rooms, and exchanged a word with their neighbours. Carelessly the straggling files wove and interwove; one boy managed to knock the bell from the corner of the platform, another kicked it along the floor with a metallic protesting sound. A master shouted, and the bell was restored. The other half of 4a form, from the chemistry laboratory, threaded its way into Mr. Rattlethrough's room after the section from the nearer physics laboratory was seated.

Mr. Rattlethrough stood at the door, irritation on his oval face. He was a man of medium height, about forty years of age, and invariably he wore a blue suit shiny at the elbows and the seat of the trousers, which were short, creaseless, and baggy, with frayed bottoms turned up and showing a permanent exhaustion of fringe. He made a point of wearing his gown whenever he left 4b class-room, and always referred to Mr. Rore as the Head Master, emphasising each

segment with staccato abruptness. His eyes were a forget-me-not blue, his cheeks had a hectic flush that reminded Willie of bottled cherries enhanced by cochineal, his mouth was hidden by a moustache resembling picked oakum which he alternately gnawed and fingered.

"Hurry, that boy, or I shall keep you in. Stop talkin'!" he shouted irritably to the seated boys instant silence following.

He walked to his desk and sat down.

"Close that door after you, you stupid fool!" glaring at the last-comer, who darted back and slammed the door with nervousness, panting the while.

"Stand out there, miserable midget."

The last-comer, a boy who sometimes stuttered named Clemow, stood with his back to the class, and forthwith commenced to gaze absently at the lists of irregular French verbs, conjugation tables and other dusty dreariness chalked with a painful neatness upon brown paper and pinned in one straight line upon the wall before him.

"I won't have this talkin'," went on Mr. Rattlethrough, leaning back in his chair, fingering his ropey moustache and vibrating his right knee—his nerves, like his trouser buttons, his gown, and his moustache, were permanently frayed—"Never have I met such an unruly lot of hooligans in my life. There is no discipline in the school. Why were you last?" glaring at Clemow.

"Mr. Rore detained me, if you please, Sir."

"Who?" shouted Mr. Rattlethrough. Consternation caused him to gnaw his moustache.

"The er-er-er-er Head Master, Sir."

"That's better! The HEAD MASTER! I never *heard* of the Head Master being called by his name in any other school. Certainly not at Bedbridge! Why did you see the Head Master?"

"If y-y-y-you please, suker-suker-suker-Sir, the Huh-huh—the Head Master cur-cur-caned me."

A change came over the face of Mr. Rattlethrough. His knee ceased to vibrate; his irritability vanished, he smiled frankly and charmingly.

4a knew that he was going to make a joke and prepared itself to make the most of it.

"Then perhaps, Clemow, I acted under the direct influence of a benign Providence in orderin' you to stand out in front."

Clemow smiled genially, and the class sniggered obsequiously.

Three boys peered surreptitiously at watches. Time was passing slowly.

Mr. Rattlethrough chuckled, looking round at the boys.

4a hoped that he would continue to make jokes, so that the dreaded reading-aloud of *Le roi des montagnes* before translating would be postponed as long as possible.

"Who says that there is no direct intervention in human affairs?" inquired the master, stroking his moustache. "Here a miserable boy is caned by the Head Master, and acting under an unseen force, I order him to stand out there. I did not know that a certain position of *le misérable*"—the word was uttered with the most painstaking enunciation, and Mr. Rattlethrough's face radiated such *bonhomie* that it resembled the sign that creaked and swayed before the Rising Sun, a low pothouse frequented by watermen down by the river at Colham—"had received an undue attention recently. Never rail against Fate, Clemow"—the master shook his head waggishly—"or you will show yourself to be an ingrate. Yes, an ingrate. What? Huh! huh! huh!" he chuckled.

4a as a class was sophisticated. It knew that to take advantage of Mr. Rattlethrough's lax attitude—he was leaning back in his chair and swaying gently backwards and forwards and fingering almost lovingly his moustache—would be most disastrous. With other masters it was not a case for the strictest attention and response to their quips and humours. In Mr. Rattlethrough's class-room during these rare lapses, no boy allowed his attention to wander; no boy attempted a clandestine conversation; no boy attempted to pinstick his neighbour or flip paper bullets by means of elastic bands and the teeth. No one dared to do any of these things lest the genial acescence of Mr. Rattlethrough

be changed entirely into vitriolic acidity, and there followed the awful ordeal of reading aloud amid a torrent of destructive criticism upon whose stormy waters floated like uprooted trees and debris such hissed epithets as "stupid fool," "idiot," "depraved lunatic," "abandoned wretch," and (as a sort of trade mark to his specialised profession) "*sans culottes*" and "*gamin*."

Mr. Rattlethrough swayed backwards and forwards, appearing several times to the class as though he must crash over backwards into the wall, but always just managing to save himself. 4a watched the pensive manipulation of his moustache change to an absent-minded sucking of a thumb nail, and knew by that sign that the crisis was approaching. Either Mr. Rattlethrough would become irritable and order an immediate resumption of work (angrily, as though 4a were responsible for its idleness) or he would meander into digressive reminiscences of an autobiographical nature. Sometimes he told them of his own schooldays at Bedbridge—but 4a could not possibly imagine Ratpoison as a school-boy. Many boys, of course, wished fervently that they had been alive when he was at Bedbridge, in which case an expedition comprising about three hundred and fifty boys from Colham would have marched to that town and solemnly cut him up into little pieces and thrown them to the pike that hide among the weedbeds of the Ouse and seem eternally to elude capture by the melancholy anglers who line its banks.

4a held its breath. Again those boys who owned watches glanced fearsomely at them. Willie, shivering at the bottom of the class, was muttering a rehearsal; it was he who would begin to read out a few sentences in French, and then render them into English. Since the beginning of the term he had haunted the inside seat of the desk at the extreme right-hand front of the class-room. This place was ignominious, yet coveted. Its advantages included the security of the knowledge that its occupier would begin the translation: he could therefore render it word-perfect. Once the torrent of Mr. Rattlethrough's displeasure were passed, he could dispense with any feverish need to think and rack a terrified brain.

Those higher up worked out their approximate paragraph, but no reward for their labour was guaranteed, owing to the fact that a boy lower down might "muck his turn," and be ordered to stand out in front, when his neighbour would have to bear the double and ironic burden of translating a part unfamiliar to himself and later to hear his own exquisitely prepared sentences "mucked" by the next boy. Once Mr. Rattlethrough had been known to begin at the top of a class, and not even Cromwell dissolving Parliament had caused comparatively more consternation. A class empire had toppled; reputations were lost and made; the good boys at the head of the class were detected in their hypocrisy in maintaining a high position not by merit but by cunning; those few and rare and quietly studious boys (in after life they usually adorned obscure positions in Whitehall, and were heard of no more except by casual reference in that palsied periodical *The Colhamean*) who had prepared conscientiously their translations for once assumed the correct prominence deserved of virtue; and Bony Watson, caught in the act of opening a dictionary, was taken to the Head Master by Mr. Rattlethrough who requested with his usual subservience that he might be allowed to cane him. On these occasions Bony's cropped and acorn-shaped head would assume a more elongated appearance, his ears would distend, and his face would resemble one of the skulls that a morbid visitor to Hythe Church may view in the crypt for the payment of sixpence.

Mr. Rattlethrough continued to suck his thumbnail. Willie felt that burning at the stake was nothing in comparison to the boiling feeling all over him. 4a waited. Clemow coughed. Mr. Rattlethrough looked up, stared vacantly at 4a, who perceived that he was fingering his moustache and not gnawing it. There was hope after all.

"Huh-huh-huh," gurgled the master, and 4a sighed after the tension. "I remember a boy at Bedbridge being caned by the Head Master so often that he came to school permanently with a leathern satchel sewn on the inside of his pants. Huh-huh-huh."

4a sniggered. Willie licked his lips, and wondered how

much longer it would last ; how far away was eleven o'clock ?

" You, Clemow," he continued, turning to the boy standing in front, who smiled nervously and attempted for some obscure reason to balance himself upon one leg, " you have not yet distinguished yourself sufficiently to warrant the bestowal of the Order of the Leathern Shield. Huh-huh-huh. Bailey was a curious boy. He seemed to be possessed of a fatal faculty of attractin' attention to himself. It was Bailey, I think. No, no, it was Priestley. No, no, my memory is failin' me. Let me see, eighteen eighty-five. Longbottom was head of the school, or was it Williamson ? No, no, Longbottom. Longbottom it was—What are you sniggerin' at ? " he thundered suddenly to Effish, who appeared to be suffering from a giggling fit with his crony Beckett. " STAND OUT THERE, STUPID FOOL ! "

Effish, with his eyes looking like watery blue soap bubbles and the thin lithe Beckett, eyes small and shifty and bright, joined Clemow, and Mr. Rattlethrough banged their heads together.

" I shall keep you all in," he fumed, glaring balefully around the room. " Who's that sniffin' ? You, Macarthy ! Stand out there ! Sniff, sniff, mornin' noon and night. I've never known such an unruly lot of hooligans in my life. There is no discipline in the school. Why, dash me, we never sniffed at Bedbridge—we had handkerchiefs ! "

" Bet he used a bandanna," whispered Bony out of the corner of his large mouth.

" STOP COUGHIN', YOU," he bawled to a boy named Fitztaucher, a most conscientious and hard-working boy, but with such an insignificant and marcid appearance that he was kicked more than any other boy in the school.

Fitztaucher immediately went red in the face, exploded and coughed dismally into a handkerchief with a dull booming sound.

" Coughin' and sniffin' is what I have to put up with," groaned Mr. Rattlethrough, gnawing his moustache, glaring, and vibrating his right knee furiously. " I've never met

such an unruly lot of boys in all my life. *A qui est le tour ?* " he shouted suddenly.

Willie raised a quavering hand, and mumbled, "*C'est à moi, merseer.*"

"Go on !"

"*Lorsker lays mees awaye—*" he commenced rapidly.

"Page, page," cried Mr. Rattlethrough. "How many more times am I to tell you that it is the duty of the boy occupyin' the gutter of the class to tell the page and line ? What ? Stand out there, *malheureux* ! Next boy ! *Continuez, s'il vous plait.*"

Willie crept out, upsetting his friend's satchel as he did so, and shooting its contents over the floor. One of Jack's habits was to carry within his satchel an enormous number of pens, pencils, and rulers. In fact he collected these badges of servitude with a fervour nearly equalled by that of Willie for birds' eggs, Fitztaucher for stamps, Macarthy for nuts and bolts, Effish for silver cap-badges, Beckett for cigarette pictures of the *Famous-Boxer Series*, and Bony for wings, claws, talons, and bleached skeletons of hawks, jays, and stoats filched from various keeper's vermin poles in the district. Pens, pencils, and rulers were legitimate spoil, like gymnasium shoes and football boots ; but with Jack his hobbies developed to obsessions and thence to manias.

"Pick them all up," cried Mr. Rattlethrough, "stupid, careless fool. Throw them in the waspay-basket. All of them. *Continuez, next boy.*"

"Page ninety-nine line eight *lorsker lays—*"

"WAIT, you depraved wretch, will you ? Page ninety-nine, line eight. *Nais y sommes. Continuez, enfant terrible !*"

"*Lorsker lays emmy knee—*"

"*Gamin !*" yelled Mr. Rattlethrough. "Go on, next boy. Go on—*Lorsque les ennemis.*"

The next boy faltered. He said "*avic*" for "*avec*" instead of the master's meticulously enunciated "*arvec.*" Such a mistake called forth considerable irritability ; falteringly the lesson proceeded, while brains were distressed and the nervous systems of those boys highly-strung were subjected to alternate tension and the flaccidity of the reaction.

Fitzaucher, who worked hard at home because he was that kind of boy, was so nervous that he could not speak for a second, although he did not usually stutter; he knew the passage, but in sheer fright could not commence. He burst into tears, which called forth sarcasm from Mr. Rattlethrough at the time, and coarseness from his fellows afterwards; and so the French lesson dragged along on what seemed crippled feet till with a vast sigh of relief 4a heard the preliminary tinkle of the bell in Hall; an eternity of space lapsed; and its swinging silver peals announced the termination of the third hour, and a ten minutes' break.

Mr. Rattlethrough ignored the bell. The boy next to Bony, who happened to be struggling with a *viva voce* rendering of one of the long-winded egoisms of the principal brigand when the bell sounded, congratulated himself prematurely on his luck. Frenziedly he searched under the desk among the flimsy pages of an atrociously printed French-English dictionary, but he was too agitated to discover the meaning of the word *carnage*. So he made a guess and rendered the unknown word as carriage.

The minutes passed. Boys looked with righteous ostentation at their watches, rage in their hearts. Ratpoison was curtailing their liberty. They were entitled to ten minutes' break at eleven o'clock. Yet none dared to show upon his face the bitter thoughts within his mind.

At five minutes past eleven o'clock, Mr. Rattlethrough closed his book, and the boys rose all together, slammed books and filed out irregularly. Mr. Rattlethrough shouted "Quietly there!" The jostling diminished but slightly. 4a cared no longer now that there was some justification for ignoring Ratpoison. He had diddled them of five minutes' break—he was a dirty cad—he deserved to be written an anonymous letter.

Once outside the class-room, 4a forgot its hate and rushed helter-skelter through the heavy door into the upper playground. One half of the boys continued their rush down the steps into the lower playground, yelling joyously as some tousle-haired lad released a tennis ball for a kickabout.

"On the pill, boys! On the pill! Pass, man! Oh, *pass*!!"

Sides were not formed, boys rushed anywhere ; no goal-keeper occupied the chalked posts upon the woodwork shop at one end and a railing on the other. The exhortations to pass were ignored, since every man was for himself ; had sides been formed, the ball would not have been passed. Every one was for himself. If one swift individual dribbled the worn tennis ball, a score pursued him, bumping, charging, and shouting. Bony was there, kicking ponderously with legs that resembled those of a young colt ; head and shoulders above every one else and pushing them away with his huge hands as they butted him like goats. Willie was there, running swiftly but rarely seeming to kick the ball ; Jack was more skilful ; Effish and Beckelt charged each other upon every possible occasion and ended up by having a wrestling match, cheered by the others who prodded the writhing contestants genially with their boots.

Four boys were playing fives in the court ; three were watching them from above, one of them, a fair-haired boy named Macarthy, throwing orange peel at them and receiving alternately threats of extinction and whining complaints of "Stop it, I say, man." Clemow and Hoys, the deadly rivals of Willie and Jack, were discussing the possibilities of tracking the two that afternoon and ragging their nests ; gentle-eyed Rupert Bryers, whom everybody liked and admired, and who liked every boy in return (he was incapable of hate) was reading an early poem of Keats.

*How silent comes the water round that bend
Not the minutest whisper does it send
To the o'erhanging willows : blades of grass
Slowly across the chequered shadows pass,*

he read slowly, thinking of the meadow where he loved to sit with his mother. He was the only boy in the school who liked reading poetry, although several had been known to compose verses ; but they were either about unpopular masters or sent to girls at the High School with whom a few of his friends were in love. Willie had asked him one day to write a valentine to a "Golden-haired Blue-Eyed Fairy Queen,"

and he had done it for nothing. Willie was always sad when the spring came to an end : he liked Willie, almost as much as Bony, and thought him a tremendous hero ever since he had sprung the jay traps in Brogborough Wood on one famous occasion, running away from home afterwards.

Clemow came up to him.

"Why're you reading poetry, eh, Bryers ?" he inquired.

"Soppy muck—get enough of that bilge under old Bunny," endorsed his friend Hoys.

Bryers closed the book, put it in his pocket, and answered, "Much better'n Woggledagger. Some sense in Keats."

"Here's old Bunny," sighed Clemow disgustedly.

A man had appeared at the upper playground railings and called out, "Fall in 4a," turned round and walked back, hands in pockets, gown sailing out behind, and eyes upon his highly polished brown boots. He had enormous feet, but the fact did not worry him. Nothing worried Mr. Kenneth. He understood boys. 4a thought that Mr. Rore did not think very highly of History. After all, Mr. Kenneth had only taken a second in History at Oxford ; Mr. Rore himself was a London man, with first-class honours in mathematics among other things. And London men work while Oxford men have the traditions of centuries to maintain. Mr. Kenneth in the private opinion of Mr. Rore had not developed his mental power.

But as a master he was liked, and therefore was told less lies than were told to the others.

Reluctantly the boys fell in near the door, breathing hard, talking, panting ; a little queue rushed for a final gulping drink to the fountain adjoining the chemistry laboratory whence was issuing, as it so happened, a foul smell of sulphuretted hydrogen. The boys already lined up made an exaggerated action of holding their noses, and uttered loud cries of "Poo, most beastly niff—Poo, what a ponk—I say, Poo !" while Effish, the class comic, pretended to faint drolly into the arms of the never-still Beckelt. One by one, other boys came up, running very slowly ; Bony lumbered up to the fountain, was sternly called to the line, and pathetically turned away, looking more cadaverous of face than ever.

Willie and Jack came up the last but one, as the remaining boy had been left to salvage his tennis ball at which some one with callous indifference had taken a final root and sent into the roadway leading down the hill into Colham.

"Come on," urged Mr. Kenneth, looking up from his brown boots.

The boy, with tongue distended, lolloped across the upper playground.

"Don't hurry, wi' you?" rang a keen ironic voice.

4a jumped into life. Silence fell upon the boys. Mr. Rore was peering at the latecomer under his semi-circular glasses.

"Double, sah! Double!!"

The boy looked as though he would burst his heart with the greatest willingness for the tall broad-shouldered figure standing by the door.

"Mr. Kenneth!"

The English master hurried up. A whispered conversation, short, terse, the tail end of which 4a managed, by the straining of ears, to hear.

". . . that mental paar."

The spirit of 4a groaned, and Mr. Rore disappeared.

4a filed through Hall, past the dozing Specials waiting for half-past twelve, and into Mr. Kenneth's class-room, each boy thumping with his heels upon the iron grating as he passed through the door and into the lobby. Bony came last, and having closed the door, ragged swiftly most of the caps upon the pegs, and joined the others looking solemnly virtuous as he shuffled to his seat. 4a took out copies of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and prepared to be mildly bored by Shakespeare, otherwise Woggledagger, Tremblesword, or Quiverspoons, till a quarter to twelve.

One of Mr. Kenneth's peculiarities was the wearing of brown boots every day. Rumour at Colham Grammar School among the boys said that he slept in them; certainly he wore them on Speech Days, with his gown and its hood of fur. Boys at school are quick to note such things about their masters; in after life the peculiarity of the master outlives his personality, or rather his peculiarity makes nearly all

his personality. Thus for generations Mr. Kenneth had been known as Bunny because, when a very junior master, he had been observed to buy a rabbit, horrid with distended limbs and no fur, at Bacon's, the big shop at Colham. Many generations have come and gone since that occasion; the boy who watched the purchase after careful selection, is vanished into the world, his name sunk into oblivion; for services in the Food Ministry during the European War Mr. Rynder Bacon has become Sir Rynder Bacon, K.B.E.; his one shop has become fifty-seven, and every seaside watering place landlady gets her bacon and rabbits there; but Mr. Kenneth is still known as Bunny, and he still wears brown boots which vary, as their antiquity increases, from light canary hue to an utter annihilation of colour.

Another habit of Mr. Kenneth was the keeping of a minute piece of chalk in his right-hand coat pocket. This at times he brought forth and tossed into the air repeatedly, speaking the while. Invariably he produced it at what to him were moments of intellectual lucidity. Once or twice he had mislaid it; and never had a master's power of explanation or memory failed so immediately.

He was tall, broadshouldered, and partially bald. His face was lean, and the lower half would have been described by a prehistoric novelist as lantern-jawed. He seemed permanently unshaven, and was usually seen making enormous strides up Colham Hill towards the masters' entrance by those boys who avoided being late by a small margin of time themselves. His eyes were kindly, gray, set rather close together; he wore enormously high collars, known to his pupils as "brainstarvers," and a gigantic ginger-coloured moustache that seemed to grow parallel to the ground and to consist of stiff hair slightly thinner than a housewife's besom. He looked through pince-nez spectacles, rimmed in tarnished steel and with a rusted centre-spring. Upon the third finger of his left hand rested a large gold wedding ring which he spun quickly with the finger and thumb of his right when annoyed by a pupil's stupidity.

A vague noise came from the class. Effish and Beckelt were playing noughts-and-crosses; Macarthy was polishing

beneath the desk a handful of nuts and bolts ; Bryers was dreaming ; Clemow and Hoys were reading conjointly a copy of White's *Selbourne* ; Bony was chewing an american gum, of the four-ounces-a-penny variety that he had found in the chipped, bored, and rutted desk at which he sat ; while Willie was drawing a pike on the flyleaf of his Shakespeare, and Jack was watching him. The other boys were talking, yawning, pinsticking, and generally slacking ; one individual sallow of face and with a complexion as clear as a railway carriage window and a nose like a pick-axe, had settled down to sleep with his head pillowed in his arms upon the desk.

" Well, Cerr-Nore," said Mr. Kenneth, after looking up from his brown boots, " what's the matter ? "

Cerr-Nore major did not move. His neighbour prodded him. Cerr-Nore major remained as somnolent as before. He was a boy who was peculiar, according to his classmates, to the extent of harmless insanity. He frequently pretended to be asleep with his head on his arms.

" Cerr-Nore ! " cried Mr. Kenneth, a note of anger in his voice. The boy looked up sleepily. His red hair was ruffled, and his long thin nose quivered.

" Yessir," he blinked.

" What's the matter, Cerr-Nore ? "

" Headache, Sir," he whined.

" You are not in a casual ward," Mr. Kenneth reminded, " nor yet are you in the sixth form. You are in my classroom. Bestir yourself."

" Yessir," grumbled Cerr-Nore.

" Now, then," commenced the master briefly, " let's have a decent recitation from some one. Some one with intelligence. Effish, for example ! "

Effish looked up quickly from his game of noughts-and-crosses, put his tongue in his cheek, and with an assumption of droll surprise, answered quickly, " Me, Sir ? " and then gazed round at his neighbours with an expression that inferred that he could be knocked down with a feather.

" Yes, you," replied Mr. Kenneth grimly.

Effish cleared his throat, stood up, and after moving his

tongue round and round in his mouth, fixed his eyes on the ceiling and commenced in a dramatic manner.

"*These are the forgeries of jelly and never since the middle summer's spring—*"

"The forgeries of jelly?" asked the master.

"Jealousy, Sir," corrected Effish, with an injured air, simpering.

"Oh, yes. Go on."

"*And never since the middle summer's spring met we onhillindale forestormead.*"

"No, no, no!" cried Mr. Kenneth, "you've got no idea of rhythm. If you were an actor, I tremble to think what you would do for even the price of a crust."

"I don't want to be a nactor," reproached Effish, enjoying the sniggers of 4a. "Father says they're a wicked lot."

A shout of laughter from the class.

"Oh, really?" inquired Mr. Kenneth. "Well, come here."

Effish went to him, and the master put out a hand to catch him by the hair, but Effish dodged, a look of exaggerated terror in his eyes.

"Pauper speerit," whispered Bony.

The class laughed.

"Come along, Effish," called the master lazily.

Effish's head was smacked, twice and deliberately, and each time he cried out, "Oh, oh."

"Effish, of course, will repeat his lesson to me at half-past twelve. Go on Watson. Don't trouble to remove that acid drop from your mouth."

"You've guessed my secret," muttered Bony.

4a tittered, and Mr. Kenneth looked down at his boots, drew a piece of chalk from his pocket, threw it into the air, and deftly caught it.

Bony began canorously, paying great attention to the metre.

"*These are the forgeries of jealousy. And never since the middle summer's spring. Met we on hill in dale forest or mead. By paved fountain or by rushy brook. But in the beached margent of the sea. To dance our ringlets—*"

"Apparently word perfect, but otherwise uttered as intelligently as a fire-watered aborigine! Go on, Maddison, where he left off."

Willie stood up and stared at the floor.

"*To dance our ringlets to the whistling wind,*" urged Mr. Kenneth softly.

"*To dance our ringlets to the whistling wind,*" Willie repeated, frowning.

"*But with——*" suggested Mr. Kenneth.

"*But with——*" said the boy, staring at the ceiling as though in great agony.

"*—— thy brawls——*"

Willie's face lightened.

"*But with thy brawls thou hast ruined our sport, therefore——*"

"Disturbed our sport, Maddison."

"Yes, Sir. *But with thy brawls thou hast disturbed our sport, therefore the winds calling to us without result have sucked up mist and fog revengefully on account of the moon overbearing its continent——*"

"No, no, no!" cried Mr. Kenneth, "you're all at sea. You don't know it. You're a slacker. Come at twelve-thirty, Maddison. Go on, Fitzacher."

Fitzacher bobbed up alertly and without falter went on:—

*"But with thy brawls thou hast disturbed our sport:
Therefore the winds, piping to us in vain,
As in revenge have sucked up from the sea
Contagious fogs; which, falling on the land,
Have every pelting river made so proud,
That they have overborne their continent;
The ox——"*

"Splendid," beamed Mr. Kenneth, pitching his chalk stump into the air and catching it; then substituting for this a critical regard of his toe-caps, he told Temperley to continue.

Jack was about to begin, having taken a feverish glance

at the open book, when from the adjoining room came the dim blare of a voice. The wall was thick: like a ghostly sound it came, and 4a chuckled.

"Stand out there, stupid fool," and Watson whispered hoarsely, "Old Ratpoison's gott'em-agen," but apparently Mr. Kenneth, in no wise disconcerted by the action of bending his neck over the tall "brainstarver," was so preoccupied that he heard nothing.

"The ox hath therefore stretched his yoke in vain——" began Jack.

"The ploughman lost his sweat," whispered Willie.

"The ploughman lost his sweat——"

"And the green corn hath rotted."

"And the green corn is rotted——"

"Ere his youth attained a beard," mouthed his friend silently.

"Fair is youth's brained beard."

"The fold stands empty."

"The fold stands empty——"

"In the drownèd field."

"In the brown head killed."

4a commenced to giggle. Mr. Kenneth looked up and said:

"Twelve-thirty, Temperley. And write it out twenty times."

"Oh, Sir," said Jack.

"Twenty-five times, Temperley."

Jack muttered.

"Did you speak, Temperley?"

Jack muttered again.

Mr. Kenneth became angry.

"Come out here," he shouted. "I can stand anything but insolence."

Jack was red in the face and sullen-eyed.

"I'll see the Head Master," muttered Jack. "It isn't fair."

"Of course you will, Temperley, and his study as well, I expect. Come along."

Mr. Kenneth reached for his gown, adjusted it, said,

"Get on with your reading," to the class, and went out with the now scared Temperley. Immediately a hum arose in the class-room.

"Second time to-day," croaked Bony.

"He was damned insolent," said Hoys, aloofly.

Willie turned round and flung Jack's satchel at him. Immediately the books flew from it, and the boys seized upon them and threw them about joyously. Boys jumped on the desks; Maddison and Hoys were grappling and punching; Effish seized the opportunity of the general uproar to lift an ink-well out of its socket and secretly jerk it across the room. Unhappily for Macarthy it hit his forehead and belched over his face a black slime with which rotted blotting paper pills, dead flies, and old rusted nibs were mingled. Macarthy swore, the class cheered; four gym shoes whizzed through the air and were returned immediately; books followed. The hum swelled to a dishevelled roar; attracting one of the specials from Hall, who opened the door suddenly and cried:

"Come along, come along. Saw your eyes. I'll gie you that cane!"

4a sank to silence, then laughed with relief. Rather disappointed that the row had stopped, the Special Slacker flung a couple of shoes, hitting Beckelt who was whacking Effish with a ruler; and the scrimmage recommenced with such abandon that the Special went back to his seat in alarm, but fiercely glad inside and gloating at the inevitable consequences.

It was unfortunate for Bony that when he saw the door opening again he should think that the Special had returned to repeat his joke. For Bony flung a burst indiarubber shoe and almost hit Mr. Rattlethrough who had heard the noise of disturbance and left the wretched boys of 5c in order to ascertain its meaning. It was unfortunate also for Willie that he should be trying to rend over the head of Hoys a satchel that had somehow come into his hand. Mr. Rattlethrough noted that Watson had flung the shoe that smacked the wall three inches away from his left ear and that Maddison was apparently one of the worst offenders before silence and

stillness brooded over 4a. Macarthy ducked his head to hide the blotch that had given one side of his face the bloom of a grape, and continued to scrape stealthily with the blotting paper he had taken from Mr. Kenneth's desk.

"Oh, so this is how you behave when left upon your honour to work, is it?" shouted the master. "I have never met such an unruly lot of hooligans in all my life. Maddison and Watson, stand out there! I shall report you all to Mr. Kenneth on his return from the Head Master! The disgraceful noise of your brawlings, illiterate sweeps, could be heard in Colham."

He glared round, encountering surreptitious glances that on meeting his forget-me-not eyes looked away guiltily but swung back again as if drawn by a ghastly fascination.

"Get on with your work," he ordered sharply, looking quickly from one falling glance to another, which seemed to infuriate him. "WATSON, DON'T STARE AT ME, YOU GRINNIN' FOOL!"

Bony bent low over *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and stared so intently at one blurred word that his eyes, when he eventually looked up, appeared to be gazing at different objects.

When Mr. Kenneth returned with Jack, Mr. Rattlethrough went forward, his glasses held elegantly in his left hand, and said, with a punctiliousness bordering on obsequy:

"Oh, Mr. Kenneth, a thousand pardons for my trespassin's, but I was so disturbed by the noise these boys were makin' that it was impossible for me to hear my own voice. *This-s-s boy*"—pointing to Maddison—"was brawlin' with an inoffensive lad, and jammin' a satchel over his head, and *this-s-s boy*"—pointing to the lank sagging figure of Watson—"this-s-s boy threw a shoe at me and nearly blinded me. A thousand apologies, Sir, for my trespass, and . . . er . . ."

Mr. Kenneth bowed, taking a swift glance at his boots as he did so, and noticed a speck of dirt on one.

"I am sorry that you should have been disturbed, Mr. Rattlethrough. I will deal with them severely."

Mr. Rattlethrough looked at his taller colleague with an almost piteous expression; the spectacles in his left hand quivered.

"I *must* ask your pardon for my . . . er . . . my . . . er . . . trespassin's, Mr. Kenneth . . ."

Mr. Kenneth ran a finger round his "brainstarver," nodded cheerily, and the French master hurried fussily out, the baggy seat of his blue-serge trousers shining dully as he went through the door. A hum was coming from his own class-room, but it died suddenly a moment later. Willie felt sick. He knew he would be caned. Bony's ears seemed to grow limp and over his face spread a corpse-like grin.

"Come here," ordered Mr. Kenneth abruptly.

He gave them two sharp cuts with a ruler on each hand. They bore it stoically, because it did not hurt excessively; and Effish whispered, "Oh, oh," as though he himself were being struck, looking round in mock anguish and licking his lips and rolling his eyes.

"Come on," said the English master, and gave him six sharp cuts. But Effish did not mind; he had raised a laugh and been prominent in the eyes of the class.

Five minutes later 4a was being bored. The savour had gone from life. The boys yawned, and prayed for half-past twelve o'clock. At last Woggledagger was done with, and at ten minutes to twelve the bell announced the commencement of the final hour—drawing and design under the tuition of the lugubrious Mr. Worth.

The inability of this gentleman to control a class, combined with a dreamy personality, was his finest qualification for the vocation of schoolmaster at Colham, for it made him highly successful as an antidote to Mr. Rattlethrough. Under his laxity they recovered from the French master's bludgeoning. Mr. Worth had the temperament of a minimus poet, which found outlet in drawing and design and a certain love for natural history, neither of which was great enough to be communicable as an enthusiasm. He was above the average height, of frail physique, and possessed of a studious demeanour. He stooped a little wearily towards the end of a school day, when usually his face was gaunt, his eyes sunken and black.

The impertinent Cerr-Nore once said after a visit to London that he had seen Mr. Worth's double; certainly a

pronounced pallor of cheek and forehead intensifying the jet of his eyes and the wisps of thread-like hair upon the small head increased his resemblance to one of those awful and silent dummies that are grouped together in that underground chamber of Madame Tussaud's which is still the delight and horror of visitors to London from the West Country.

At some antediluvian period a boy had discovered his first name to be Eustace, and since then the master had borne the nickname of Old Useless. At times a violent temper would possess Mr. Worth, a temper lasting but a minute. On these occasions he was apt to do unusual acts, such as emptying a boy's satchel out of the window, breaking a drawing-pointer on the desk, or tearing so violently at a boy's collar that it parted company from his shirt with a rending noise. Invariably when he did these things he moaningly bellowed the same formula. "I won't have it, I won't have it." His passion apparently blinded him to the humour of a situation wherein he said, "I won't have it" when dropping the satchel or hurling the collar into the wastepaper basket. But these occasions were infrequent, and Mr. Worth was usually apathetic and dolorous as he moved among the hollow wooden shells of his cubes, spheres, rhomboids, pyramids, and other figures the likenesses of which a million times had been reproduced, distorted, caricatured, or disguised entirely, according to the skill of the multitudes that had sat before them with pencils, rubbers, papers, and (not a few times) concealed rulers and compasses.

4a sat lazily at the desks in Mr. Worth's class-room, happily conscious that twelve o'clock had been passed, and that in another half an hour the class would be free till Monday morning. Boys thought that no homework need be done on that Saturday evening, and were content. Indeed two twin brothers named Golding with dark curly hair and prominent noses were learning the next speech in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in order to store it up for the future.

Mr. Worth moved from desk to desk, handing out photographic copies of old classic statuary, such as *Themistocles (from the bust in the Vatican)*, *Roman schoolboy in the Toga*

Prætexta (from a statue and a terra-cotta bas-relief), *A Hemicyclium* (Pompeii), and *Marking out Boundaries with a Plough* (from a coin), which the boys had to reproduce on the cartridge paper before them. Three members of 4a had a natural gift for drawing; they were interested in their work, and Mr. Worth on one occasion had praised them; and while the others talked and slacked till "final bell," they worked steadily, actuated chiefly by the hope that Old Useless would praise them again. Neither Willie nor Jack could draw, so they made a pretence of copying *Statue of Ianus* whenever Mr. Worth looked their way, lest he should project them "into the Head Master." Had such a calamity fallen upon them they would not have gone, as it was the last hour; but would have spent the time skulking in the lavatory by the chemistry laboratory till half-past twelve, whence on hearing the bell they could have slipped into 4a class-room and no one have been any the wiser.

"I say," whispered Willie, "I votes we don't go with Useless this afternoon bug-hunting. Bony isn't going, nor Rupert, and I know that Clemow and Hoys are going on their own. Let's hop it."

"Hopped it last week, man!" Jack warned.

"Doesn't matter. Let's climb the rookery."

"Right!"

Willie's imagination sent a colour to his cheeks. He drew what was meant to be a rook in the corner of his paper, but it resembled more a beetle that had fallen into an ink-well and was struggling on its back.

"Stop talking, stop talking," Mr Worth turgidly commanded. His face took on a lilac hue. No one paid attention to the command. Through the wall could be heard the irritable ravings of Mr. Rattlethrough, for the class-rooms were separated by a wooden partition that could be rolled back, thus making the two class-rooms into one upon the historic occasion of Speech Day in the summer, when the boys, sitting in rows facing the platform, were able to get a fine view of the backs of the Governors as they reclined upon specially-hired chairs after their champagne luncheon. Everything therefore that was said could be heard in either

room, and 4a listened with joy to the halting translation of a wretched youth on whom Mr. Rattlethrough was showering his usual thunderbolts. Two boys in the back turned round and stared through the holes bored in the cracks of the partition. One of them, Effish, placed his lips on a crack and blew suddenly. Mr. Rattlethrough's chair grated; there was the sound of an opening door, and Effish commenced to draw with a perfervid desire. 4c door opened, and Mr. Rattlethrough came in, spectacles held poised in his left hand, and gnawing his moustache.

"Oh . . . er . . . excuse me, please . . . er . . . Mr. Worth," he began nervously, an expression of pain in his blue eyes, "but . . . er . . . a . . . er . . . boy is blowin' through the . . . er . . . partition. I distinctly felt a cold draught on the back of my neck. May I find the culprit?"

"Yes yes," murmured Mr. Worth, his dark eyes woeful, his voice feeble and thin. He looked as though he were about to be embalmed against his will.

"Effish, I think it was you, what?"

The French master glared at Effish, who looked up as though unable to believe that Mr. Rattlethrough could credit him with such an action.

"Me, Sir?" he asked incredulously.

"WAS IT YOU BLOWIN', BOY?"

"Blowin', Sir? I never felt any blowin', Sir."

"Don't argue! Answer my question. Did you . . . or did you not . . . blow through the compartment?"

"The compartment, Sir?"

"WITLESS WRETCH!" bawled the master, "were you blowin' through the compartment?"

"I've been drawin', Sir! Look, Sir, I can show you my drawin'!"

"WATSON, DON'T STARE AT ME, YOU GRINNIN' FOOL!!" bellowed Mr. Rattlethrough.

Watson hid his head. The class chuckled. Effish felt an immense and sensuous feeling of great fear and thrilling nervousness at the base of his spine. That was one reason why he delighted in dangerous encounters with various masters, although his feigned air of innocent insolence often

led him into Mr. Rore's study. Behind a barrier of buffoonery that was almost second nature to him by reason of its constant assumption lurked a clever and a cunning brain.

Possibly Mr. Rattlethrough felt that he was appearing ridiculous; he looked like a nervous visitor in a dentist's waiting-room who hears in an adjoining chamber the incoherent cries of a victim emerging from gaseous purgatory.

"Was it you, Beckett?" addressing the boy who shared Effish's desk.

"No, Sir, not me, Sir, no Sir."

Effish began to cough violently. 4a was enjoying itself. Mr. Worth sat still and said nothing.

Mr. Rattlethrough asked every boy in the back row if he had been blowing, and received from each a denial. He turned with a fretful expression to the drawing master.

"I . . . er . . . am sorry, Mr. Worth, to have disturbed you. The boy will not own up. He . . . er . . . is apparently without a sense of honour. I am . . . er . . . afraid that we must leave it at that!"

"Yes yes Mr. Rattleoo," mumbled his colleague.

The French master withdrew. The hum in his own room ceased, and in silence 4a heard him walking to his seat, calling out:—

"Whose turn is it? Go on, then, and try and remember that *avec* is pronounced *arvec* and not *evick*. *Continuez*, miserable wretch."

A weak voice commenced to read aloud.

4a went on lazily with its drawing, until Bony occupied its interest by stretching out a long claw-like hand over two desks and rapping a boy on the head.

"Sit down, sit down," fluted Mr. Worth.

Bony rubbed his ear. The boy had shot a pellet at him.

"Oh, oh," lamented Effish a moment later, "oh, oh, water some one."

"Quiet, you boy," piped Mr. Worth who was losing his temper.

"My head, my head," groaned Effish, rolling his eyes and grinding his teeth.

"Old Useless doesn't half get ragged," grinned Bony to Rupert.

"It's rather a shame, Bony."

"Come out HERE, boy, I won't HAVE this nonsense," shouted the master. He leapt from his desk, went up to Effish, who immediately wrapped his hands round his ears and head and ducked under the desk. Mr. Worth clawed his back, but could get no grip. Effish called out "oh, oh," in a dull voice, "oh, oh, I'm drowning."

"Go in to MR. RORE," cried Mr. Worth.

"The Head Master," corrected Bony.

Effish got up with a dazed look, put his hand to his brow and moaned incoherently.

"Go on," ordered the drawing master.

The door opened suddenly, and Mr. Rore himself appeared. For a moment he stood looking keenly over his semi-circular glasses, his pink face, with its healthy smooth glow and white drooping moustache, gazing at Effish. For a moment only, but every boy had sunk in fear to his desk. For a moment only, but it seemed as if the room were charged with some great dynamic force; every brain responded with awe to the vibrant energy of the righteously practical idealist.

A boy's mind is sown indiscriminately with the seeds of heredity, and the traits of his character may raise their blossom early or late. In a field there are some seeds, as the charlock or wild mustard, that will grow after a century of being buried deep in the earth. Throughout the years they may lie dormant, awaiting a chance moment when the plough shall leave them near the surface, and the mystic power of sunlight call them forth into life. But whereas in a field there may be only a hundred different species of seeds, in each boy's mind there are an infinite number of impulses, traits, and characteristics struggling for expression and mastery. The thoughts of a boy are rarely stable. New thoughts are continually blossoming. There are some fields in which the poppies outnumber the stems of corn, and the farmer shall never exterminate those wanton but beautiful flowers symboling sleep and darkness; the wantons that take the nourishment of the civilised grain and eventually

enfeeble the soil. They are there ; and they remain. The thistle can be cleared with labour, but never the poppy. And like the ideal of the cultivator to free the soil so that it may be enriched for the corn that shall feed mankind, so it was the ideal of Mr. Rore to make the mind of every boy rich with power of intellect ; to endue him with a lofty mentality that in manhood would be employed for the good of the human race ; to drive from his brain in the impressionable years of his life thoughts of indolence that allowed to remain would lead to a poverty of ideas, a vicious and distorted outlook, a mental pauperism.

So keen was he to do good, that frequently he mistook other things for signs of indolence and deceit, of a premature pauperism of soul ; for in boyhood the shoots of sprouting traits may resemble one another. Throughout the ages great minds have pondered with sadness on the heaped misery of the centuries, seeing on one hand the beauty of the earth, and on the other the blindness of its peoples—the weeds of heredity that have choked the growth of the mind and robbed mankind of its birthright of happiness and goodness. Far into the night Mr. Rore pondered and worked ; sometimes wandering on the old hills above Colham, dreaming of that future when man would come into his heritage of the earth. His vision never wavered, his dream was of the spirit, his hope firm as the sun, his work ceaseless among the boys of Colham Grammar School—the boys who feared him, and who, being boys, did not understand him : nor did he understand them.

“ What is the matter, Mr. Worth ? ” he inquired, the keen voice striking the alarums of boyish minds. His eyes under the frosted brows looked at Effish, who lowered his hand.

Mr. Worth mumbled that Effish was misbehaving.

“ Well, sah ? ” inquired the Head Master coldly.

“ Headache, Sir,” moaned the boy.

“ I’m sorry,” replied Mr. Rore in low and courteous tones. “ Perhaps that explains it, Mr. Worth ? One cannot be too careful, you know.”

“ He cried out, Mr. Rore.”

"Ah, yes——"

"I suffer from neuralgia, Sir," said Effish piteously. Well he knew that it was a complaint of Mr. Rore.

4a admired his temerity in ecstatic silence.

"What a sauce," whispered Willie to Jack.

"I am sorry if you are e," condoled the Head Master. "Do not attempt to do any work to-night. Are you playing football this afternoon?"

"Yes, Sir," lied Effish. He was one of the few boys that managed to elude both sport and its alternative of expedition with the C.G.S.N.H.A.F.B.C.

"Good, good," the Head approved, "sport is necessary in order to rid the body of its waste tissues, to stimulate the mind. Boys, I cannot urge that fact too emphatically upon you. Work hard and play hard: let that be your motto. And never forget that immortal thought, *What should be, shall be*. Master your difficulties! What boys agree?"

4a showed its hands promptly, certain boys looking craftily at one another and winking, and all except Fitzmacher and Bryers thinking, "What utter rot the Old Bird spouts."

The Head Master called Mr. Worth outside, and spoke to him briefly in earnest tones. Then he was gone, and for three minutes his personality hovered in spirit over the classroom so that almost in silence the boys continued to await the bell.

When its peals shivered in Hall ten minutes later there was a wild scramble; the drawings were collected hurriedly and roughly into heaps; desks were slammed by a few impulsive boys for joy at the termination of the week's odious work. In Big Hall classes were scampering towards their different form rooms, forgetting to thump upon the iron grating that bordered the floor. A stream of boys headed for the playground, almost falling into heaps with eagerness.

4a waited impatiently for another form to quit its room, then rushed in, deposited books in desks, took homework slips, glanced at them, assorted books and crammed them into satchels.

"How about Croodbrane?" queried Jack to his friend. "Aren't you kept in?"

"Pills to Croodbrane!" said Willie. "Too much fag to show him my stuff. Besides, he might see you cribbed."

Bony and Rupert were behind them.

"I say, Weary," said Rupert, "me'n Bony'r going into Brogborough s'afternoon. Aren't we, Bony?"

"You've guessed my secret," replied his friend. "Jack and me'r going after a peregrine falcon's, eh, man?" said Willie.

"Yes," lied Jack stoutly.

"I've got a clutch," boasted Bony. "You swopped it once. 'Member?"

"Um," grinned Willie; then as he moved away, he said to Jack "Poor old Bony still cherishes those hen's eggs I painted and gave to him three years ago!" Twenty minutes later they were in the train on the way to Rookhurst, each smoking with the enjoyment of boyhood one half of a Marsuma cigarette.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON IN THE LAND OF ODDMEDODDS

"WELL, and how did you get on at school to-day?" asked Mr. Maddison, at dinner.

"Oh, all right, thank you, Father."

His father said "Ha," and for five minutes there was silence. Then he asked:—

"Aren't you playing football this afternoon, or going out with the Natural History Club?"

Willie looked at his plate and began a long and invented explanation about Mr. Worth being ill and unable to take them that afternoon.

"Mr. Rore said we could go on our own, if we promised not to spend the afternoon indoors, but we must write up notes of what we saw."

"And are you going to do it?"

"Yes, Father," replied the boy, feeling that he had told a good yarn and relieved that his father had not suspected. He spoke hurriedly and a faint colour came into his cheeks. He felt shame, not for the lie which was quite legitimate

since his father was practically the same as a master, but lest he might have been detected and scornful anger heaped upon him.

"That's right," said Mr. Maddison, almost genially; and Willie felt an uncomfortable feeling inside him.

Father and son continued to eat their dinner—the principal meal of the day. At night they had supper, not a sit-down supper, but Mr. Maddison had his carried into his study on a tray, and Willie ate his when he felt inclined with Biddy, the cook and housekeeper, in the kitchen. He enjoyed supper, especially when Big Will'um was there, sitting always in the same chair with his legs stretched out in front of him, because Big Will'um could make any kind of trap, snare or springe and was the only one in the village who could successfully noose a jack in the brook.

Sitting there in the drab room, with its worn carpet and heavy mahogany furniture, Mr. Maddison looked stealthily at his son, and in one of those lucid moments which sometimes visit a father, realised dully that as a parent he had failed. Either that, or Willie was a reversion to some ancestral type that he did not understand. He was neither like his dead wife (it was characteristic of the father that he never thought of her as his son's dead mother, but as his own love who had died in giving birth to the child) nor like himself. That he loved the boy there could be no doubt, but it was deep inside him, buried under the fallen ruins of that other love . . . he noticed that he was eating quickly.

"Don't bolt your food, Willie. I've told you that before. You must control yourself. That is one of the first lessons a man has to learn in life."

"Yes, Father," replied Willie, looking forward to the end of the meal.

Outside in the open freedom of the country the sunlight rushed suddenly from behind a great cumulus and washed with light the sweet greenery of spring; inside the room the dull wall behind was lit instantly, showing the flatness of the oil paintings hung there and their tarnished gilt frames.

"Shall I pull the blind down, Father?"

"No. The room could do with more light. Sunlight is what you want, my boy."

Willie felt a surge of gladness from his heart that nearly closed his throat. He thought of the coming joy, of the cuckoo that had arrived, of the romance in the fields as the meadow grasses waved in the wind and the blossom opened on the hawthorns.

He looked at his father quickly, and was embarrassed by meeting the full look of his eyes. He always avoided doing that if he could, unless Father wasn't looking. The sunlight showed Father's beard, straggly, and rusted with gray: and his long and clean and pink fingernails. He wasn't so bad, after all. In a burst of comradeship Willie said:

"Do you know what happens if you rub a vulcanite rod with catskin and hold it near a pithball, Father?"

Mr. Maddison went on eating.

"Do you, Father?"

"Do I *what*?"

"Do you know what happens when you rub a vulcanite rod with a catskin, or a glass rod with silk, or sealing wax on your coat?"

"I should imagine that a charge of static electricity is induced. That is common knowledge, I believe. Why?"

Willie felt foolish.

"Oh, I only wondered," he said.

"Have you been doing Physics this morning?"

Willie hesitated, and then admitted that he had.

"Oh, I see; you want to unload some of your recently acquired knowledge upon me?" inquired Mr. Maddison; and his son thought, "He is making fun of me."

Sullenly he ate his food.

"Do you, Willie?"

"No, Father."

"Yes, you were. Have you ever heard the old proverb about teaching one's grandmother to suck eggs?"

Willie had, a hundred times, and from the same source.

Conversation ceased until the housekeeper came in to clear away the plates and to remove the exhausted mutton bone that Bob the terrier was awaiting anxiously in the

kitchen. She was a short, stout woman, with a circular face and shiny cheeks upon whose rounded curves existed permanently the hue of a ripe victoria plum. Her eyebrows were dark clusters of hair, which were liable as the years went on to increase in thickness and texture proportionally as their immediate predecessors were blown off in her biennial attempts to clean the flue of the copper with gunpowder. Although she was over fifty years of age, her hair showed no grayness, and she accounted for this by the lavish use of mutton dripping applied to the scalp regularly every Saturday night since she was thirty. Otherwise no signs of youthfulness lingered with her; every part of her was stocky and plump, from her small feet amply encased in elastic-sided boots to her enormous shoulders.

"Well, Mas' Wullie, bean't ee a-goin' to eat ees meat?" she interrogated in soft dialect.

"Don't want any more."

"Thank you!" warned his father.

"Thank you," he repeated.

"Triccle tart be a-cumin', zur," she announced to Mr. Maddison.

He did not answer, but Willie said, "Good," and Biddy's face beamed.

When the plates, knives and forks, vegetable tureens and the mutton bone were placed on the tray and carried jinglingly to the kitchen, his father said:

"I've told you again and again, I won't have you speak to Biddy in a disrespectful manner. 'Don't want any more': I never heard of such a thing, a bit of a boy like you, too. Why, your voice hasn't even broken, and the Lord knows when you're going to bring a prize home. You're rudeness personified. Are you listening?"

"Yes, Father."

"Very well, then, don't let it happen again. I don't want to have continually to be telling you. It's time you grew up. Now you understand, don't you?"

"Yes, Father."

"Very well, then, remember in future—please! I won't have it. You don't think it gives me any pleasure to

continually reprove you, do you? And there's another thing I want to speak to you about. And that's about bird-nesting. I've told you again and again, but it makes no difference apparently. I may as well speak to a brick wall. You'll get me fined by your wretched hobbies one day. You know very well that that outsider Isaacs has got his knife into me and you ever since that affair of the sprung jay traps. Well, my boy, I don't want *you* to get into trouble, can't you see that?"

"Yes, Father."

"Very well, then, I'm glad you take a sensible view of it. I am going to ask you, upon your honour, not to go bird-nesting. Is that agreed?"

While he had been speaking, the father had not looked once at the son. When no answer was given, his voice grew more impatient.

"Are you going to give me your word or are you not? 'Pon my soul, you are a most extraordinary boy. I wasn't like you when I was your age. I was full of fun, not moony and miserable. How often do I hear you laugh? Any one would think that you were a bird by the way you wish to destroy your clothes climbing about. Besides, it's cruel to take eggs."

"I don't take eggs," cried Willie, a quaver in his voice. "Jack and me only want one of each kind. We like visiting our nests and seeing how they get on. Not like Clemow and Hoys who rag and have a dummy camera where they hide the eggs."

"Oh, you can't tell me! I've been a boy myself. You"—he leaned forward and pointed at his son who looked sullenly at the table cloth, a blaze of bitter thoughts within him—"You try and tell your grandmother to suck eggs. I've never met such a boy. Well, I've warned you. Since I cannot expect you to behave like a gentleman's son and act honourably up to your promises, you must be treated otherwise. Very well then. Now, listen to me: if I catch you with any eggs, or bringing young pigeons into the house, or squirrels, or anything else, without asking me first, I shall smash all the eggs you have now and thrash you. As

Mr. Rore said on your report last term, *His standard of honour should be raised*. Think what that means! But do you care, I wonder?"

("No," thought Willie to himself, "not a bit.")

"It would hardly surprise me to learn that you did not," went on Mr. Maddison. "Well, as I have said, people who are not amenable to the ordinary codes of conduct must not expect to be privileged. I should hate very much to forbid your going to Skirr Farm, but that's what it will come to unless you improve. That Temperley boy must have a bad influence on you, I fear. Yes, you can sulk, my boy! You can sulk, but you will thank me when you are older that I checked your wilful ways. Do you want to be a failure in life, like your uncle Richard in London? Very well then, he would not listen to his father when he was young, and where is he now? His life should be a monumental warning to you, my boy. He argued with his father as you are inclined to do, and would not listen to any advice."

Biddy came in with a large tart on a white plate, which she placed almost lovingly before the master of the house. That done, she withdrew two steps to watch the effect upon the boy's face when he should taste it. Although a servant nominally, she was the mistress of the house. On the nine occasions that Mr. Maddison had given her notice to leave, she had, exercising the privilege of antiquity that some old servants assume, refused absolutely to go, as she considered it her heaven-approved duty to look after the child of her dead mistress. Mr. Maddison had given way on these nine occasions, and had long since abandoned any attempt to remind Biddy that she was in his employ. Nor indeed was such reminder necessary except upon those occasions; and deeply within him was an affection for the old countrywoman based chiefly on the memory of her adoration for his wife—and her kindness to himself when he had rushed from his room that terrible night with a wild cry and she had comforted him.

"Tart, Willie?" asked his father.

"No, thank you, Father."

"Well, you are a funny boy. I thought you liked treacle tart!"

"I don't feel hungry, thank you, Father."

"'Tis a nice tart, Mas' Wullie," urged Biddy.

"A small piece, Willie? Come on!"

He shook his head.

"I made it fur ee," came from Biddy.

"I'm not hungry, thank you."

Nor would he accept any, although he had been looking forward to the tart all through the period of mechanical mastication of the mutton scraps. When the meal came to an end, he said nervously, "Oh, Father, Jack says can I go to tea with him and supper as it's Saturday?"

"You mean to ask permission? I don't like the round-about way you phrase your requests, but I suppose it's in keeping with your creepy-crawly nature. Yes, you can go. Be back by half-past eight."

"They have supper at eight." the boy faltered.

"Very well then, half-past nine."

"Oh, thank you, Father."

"Don't thank me—please! I don't want to be thanked!" replied his father gruffly. "Now run along and don't get into mischief."

"No, Father."

Mr. Maddison went upstairs. Willie got his cap from its peg in the hall, listened, then slipped back into the room, cut a large segment of the tart, and, in his own phrase, hared off towards Skirr Farm.

He met Jack along the road, and they set out for the rookery in the beechwood, speaking only at intervals. Seven years of intimacy had formed a friendship of such grandeur to themselves that perfect understanding existed in everything they did together. There is a fine fervour in boyhood friendship that rarely is present in those formed later in life; and that friendship is most rare because individuality is lost in it—it is one complete thing.

In a corner of the meadow a kestrel hawk was leaning on the breeze, brown pinions swaying in the gust, tail depressed and raised to maintain balance. Had Willie been with Rupert Bryers, he would have said: "I say, look at that windhover in the gust," but to call Jack's attention to

it (since it was a most important sight) he jerked his head in its direction and knew that his friend was thinking the same thoughts as himself. The hawk swung round and swept down the torrent of the wind, coming into its rush again and hanging poised a quarter of a mile away. Up the smooth dull green of the downs behind the cloud-shadows climbed slowly, the yellow light following after and bleaching small chalk-like objects that were sheep feeding on the sward of the slopes.

The wind billowed past them, blowing their trousers against their legs, his own thin as a heron's, he noticed ruefully, and Jack's big. It came from the south-west, lingering in the hollows of the woodlands where grew primroses and wind-anemones, stirring the young green corn and the bines of honeysuckle swinging as it passed, swaying the beech-trees where the rooks nested, and onwards, through the hedges and the nut woods : charged with sunbeams it brought once more the message to the old earth.

They passed through the meadow, crossed over the brook by a log footbridge, and came to the roadway. Hearing a shout, they turned and saw a figure waving to them about a quarter of a mile away.

"Oh, come on, man," protested Jack, seeing that his friend was waving back, "we don't want a soppy girl with us. She's sure to stick to us like glue."

"Oh, it's so rude to ignore her," replied the other lamely. Jack snorted.

"You're a fine bloke to talk, ain't you?" he scoffed. "What about that girl, Mary Ogilvie, who was here last Christmas and whom you refused to dance with, eh? And what about——"

"Carrambo," said Willie irritably.

"Well, come on, then, man, there's a sport."

"Look, she's running! Perhaps she's got a message. An invitation to tea. You liked it last time we went : remember that cake you ate such a lot of, the ginger one with almonds on it?"

"Pouff, gave me gip later on, anyway. Come on, I say!"

"Just wait and say how-dy-do to her, shall us?"

"*You're* spoony on her, I bet!"

"Liar!"

He wished that he had put some hair-oil on his head before coming out, that he had cleaned his nails, his boots—oh, heaven, supposing his ears were dirty.

"I say, Jack," he spoke hurriedly, "don't say anything about my being spoony. You're my friend, you know!"

Jack drew his forefinger across his throat, formed a circle with the finger and thumb and spat solemnly through it. Assured by this sacred token, Willie felt easier until, with momentary alarm, he noticed that Jack had spat upon his boot. He barely had time to remove this evidence of fidelity with a tussock of grass when the girl came up. The boy glanced at her sweet face, and felt a rush of blood over his own.

"Hallo, Jack," she said gaily. "Hallo, Willie. I thought it was you. Where are you going?"

"Out," replied Jack.

"We're going to climb the rookery," mentioned the other in a casual voice.

"How brave of you, Willie. May I come and watch, please?"

The boys exchanged glances.

"Do let me," she urged. "I promise not to make a noise. Say yes, Willie."

"All right," replied that youth, who had never had the courage to climb a high tree before. Now he felt that he would leap from bough to bough like a squirrel if only she ordered it. Shyly he looked at her, and felt utterly insignificant. What beautiful eyes she had: he dared not to look at them. How gold was her hair, and how thick and long the plait. She was as different from other girls as the sun was from a candleflame.

They came to the gate of the fifty-acre wheatfield, and Jack vaulted over. The girl climbed nimbly to the top bar, while Blackberry, her brown spaniel, startled a rabbit and careered across the field after it, barking with excitement, and frequently falling over himself. Habitually he chased rabbits and blackbirds, but had never succeeded in capturing

one. When Elsie had jumped down Willie vaulted but failed to clear the gate, landing in a heap on the other side. Both his companions laughed, not knowing that he had banged his ankle. Pain and mortification caused his sight to become misty, and he thought that Elsie was laughing because he could not do what Jack could.

He got up, smiling fixedly, and they saw that he was hurt. Each offered an arm, which he refused, although Elsie said, "Poor Willie" so compassionately that he wished a mad bull would dash across the field and gore him to death after he had heroically lifted her over the gate. But not so much as a cow was in sight.

Five minutes later they were laughing and talking together. Willie wondered how Jack could possibly treat her so indifferently. He never looked at her once. If only he dared ask her to be his sweetheart—but she would be offended, of course. He knew he could get her some rooks' eggs. He might get dizzy all that height up, but no matter.

Blackberry, the brown spaniel, returned from his fatuous pursuit of the coney with pink tongue lolling and eyes hypocritically pathetic as though inferring that he had thought they had intended to go that way.

"Naughty Blabby," reproved his mistress, stroking his ears, and regarded by Willie. But then, he thought, he would not want her to do that to him—he only wanted to think about her.

They kept to the lower edge of the field over which lapwings were falling and twirling, crying with wild sweetness to their mates below. The loam field stretched away up to the skyline, where the spinney of dwarfed hornbeams and beeches grew with the fir-trees. Sometimes the echo of one of the crowstarvers' *hullo-o-o-os* came to them when the wind ceased and left quiet sunshine on the lee-side of the hedge by which they walked. Sometimes the clanging of wood on the suspended length of rail was faintly borne across, then the clacking of the clappers. A boy was employed to scare the rooks and jackdaws who came to uproot the sapling corn, and paid six shillings a week to remain there all day

and every day from the winter sowing till the time when the wheat was two inches high.

Always when Willie heard the plovers and the distant hails of the crowstarvers he felt sad and yet happy, but he had never told any one because he was ashamed. Once he had composed a poem, or part of a poem, and secretly was pleased with the opening, which sometimes he repeated to himself, mostly at sunset.

*Over the fallow field crieth a lapwing
Wildly and sweetly
See-weet, see-o-weet,*

but beyond three lines all inspiration had failed.

They branched off from the immense wheatfield, crossed the brook again, and went along a high hedge of hawthorn that led to the fringe of the beech wood. A vast flock of rooks was drifting and swinging in the wind, and nearly a thousand nests had been built by the colony. Seeing the three a clangorous uproar commenced, and those birds who had been brooding on eggs or perching near the nests head to wind rose with a souging of wings that overbore the intermittent rushings of wind. Under the beech trees the boys' feet crushed the split mast-covers and brown leaves, while directly below the nests the ground was covered with fine sticks that the rooks had carried from the far oak-wood in their beaks. Sometimes they found a fragment of a thrush's egg, the remains of a young wood pigeon, and many signs that the birds pilfered the corn.

"I say, you aren't going to climb right up there, are you?" asked the girl, her eyes wide open.

Willie looked quickly at her and saw the rich colour in her cheeks.

"Oh, easy," he replied.

"But you'll fall, both of you. It's so high, and look at the wind!"

"Pooh, that's nothing," answered Jack, removing his coat and rolling up his sleeves.

"What muscles you've got, Jack!" said the girl admiringly.

Willie thought it would be best to keep his coat on, and determined that when he got home he would do dumb-bell exercises until his biceps were ten times as swelling as Jack's.

They examined several trees, and eventually found one that appeared to be less formidable than the others.

"The wind's getting up," remarked Willie, wetting his finger and holding it up.

"What's that for?" asked the girl.

"The side that's coldest is where the wind comes from," he told her, "and the Ichiargo Indians can tell if a cyclone or hurricane is coming by a tingling feeling in the finger nail. I was just wondering if a cyclone would be coming, because if so you must go home, because all these trees will be uprooted and carried for miles."

"But you're not an Ichiargo Indian," interrupted Jack.

Willie smiled in a superior way to himself.

"Perhaps I've learnt some of their secrets," he hinted.

"Liar!" Jack said. "Besides you made up Ichiargo."

Willie saw that Elsie was puzzled. He did not explain that the tribe existed only in his imagination.

"Oh, don't climb the tree, please, if you'll fall."

"You can only be killed once, and I don't care when."

"Oh, Willie, you naughty boy, to speak like that!"

"It's the truth. Jack and I are fed up with life. You just go and take a squint at the Old Bird, and have a chat with Ratpoison, and you just see what we have to put up with. I can tell you, one day we are going to sail into Rattle-through and knock his conk off."

"His what?"

"His conk—snout—sniffler—nozzle—nose."

"I expect you are naughty boys, that's why you don't like your masters."

He sniffed.

"Come on, Willie," cried Jack.

"Won't you tear your coat, Willie?" asked the girl.

The spaniel was leaping around and barking at the rooks, who had formed a circle and were sailing in cartwheel formation high over the trees. Suddenly their cries ceased, for the boys had begun to climb.

The first part, thought Willie, was easy. The branches were so numerous that even if he slipped he would bounce from branch to branch and manage to get a grip somewhere. Jack climbed rapidly. Far down below Willie could see the upturned face of the girl. In reality it was only twenty feet.

"Shall I get you an egg, Elsie?"

"Oh, so, please, Willie. And be careful not to fall."

"All right."

They climbed higher. Halfway up the tree branched. In the fork Jack was waiting for him. Laboriously he mounted, branch by branch.

"Ain't it ripping, man?" shouted his friend, his eyes shining.

"Not half!" quavered Willie.

"I say, man, you aren't funky, are you?"

Willie's hands, legs, arms, and voice were quivering. He looked down, and saw with a sickening clutch in his stomach that they seemed about a mile above the earth. He forced himself to shout back:

"No, only you know I'm not much good high up."

"You're all right, Willie. You can climb no end!"

"Can I?"

"Of course you can. Besides, it's an easy tree. Isn't the wind fine? Good as the Fair swings, ain't it?"

"Better," mumbled Willie, but his voice was lost in the wind.

Just by them hung the bedraggled skeleton of a dead rook. The branches were splashed with the birds' droppings, and covered with the evidences of grain-plundering. Looking up, Willie saw that the nests were not far above their heads.

"Aren't the birds silent?" he shouted.

"Hope they won't mob us."

Willie had a vision of a thousand furious birds pecking at his eyes, piercing his skull; again he saw in remembrance that awful discovery on the downs during the great winter—the sight of Jacob, the shepherd, held in the frozen snow with his sheep, his eyes pecked out and his face torn.

Jack saw that he had gone a grayish-green colour. A sudden fear entered him.

"Buck up!" he yelled.

Willie remembered the eggs promised to his—*lady*: he was her knight, and must not fail; if only he had written a letter to her and kept it in his pocket in case he were killed!

A sudden tumultuous outcroaking from above—the rooks were sending their anguish up to heaven.

The wind had been disturbing on the main trunk, but its fury seemed increased a score-fold against the outgrowing branches. It was necessary to grip with the knees to prevent the body being swung outwards like a bellying sail. At first Willie had to fight against an impulse to let go; but this went suddenly and took with it all sense of fear. Looking down he saw a tiny figure staring upwards. He would get the eggs for her!

He was now six feet under a nest, a huge structure, more than a yard across. Wedging his foot in a miniature fork he looked across the downs, at the nearer village with its dull brown buildings, some green and orange-faced with lichen and moss. A flight of pigeons was wheeling about Skirr Farm, fluttering and white in the sunlight. In the distance he could see the lake through the trees; and on the left the spinney where the crowstarver lived.

He climbed again, reaching a nest and leaning his arm over the mass of twigs felt his fingers seized by warm things and sucked. A hoarse squawking and gabbling came from the mud-plastered crater. The blind young rooks were stretching up their necks and trying to swallow what they imagined to be worms.

Willie looked across to the other end of the tree, and saw that Jack had placed his cap between his teeth and was putting eggs into it. He descended a few feet, and crept up another branch. The wind swayed him smoothly. Reaching across the wilderness of twigs he felt warm eggs. One by one he put them in his cap. Another nest was quite near, and he emptied it as well. Then he started to descend, feeling a triumphant glow in his heart.

With easy confidence he reached the fork. Jack was still climbing about in the summit of the tree. Willie hurried,

wanting to give her some eggs before he came down. Soon he was on the ground.

"You are wonderful," she said; "oh, and isn't your face covered with blacks and dust!"

"Is it? That's nothing," he replied, removing the cap, damp with saliva, from his mouth. All his limbs were trembling after the climb. "I say, give me your photo?"

Several birds were flying lower than the circle, and uttering dismal cries. She did not answer.

"What lovely eggs, Willie. You are brave. I shall tell Father and Mother all about it."

"You can have them," the boy said shyly. He looked at her quickly. He felt that he must run away from her. Then, feeling bashful at the silence, he added:

"Those birds up there making all that row are the mothers and fathers."

As though in reproach a broken croak floated down. He looked up and saw that a rook was flapping near its looted nest.

"Oh, Willie, think of the poor mother without her eggs. What must she think when she finds the nest empty?"

"I dunno"—he shook his head.

"Oh, hark at her!"

Willie felt bitterly that she thought him a criminal. No matter that he had desired so eagerly that she should have the eggs, no matter that he might have fallen and broken his back, and yet been happy just to see her eyes fill with tears.

"Don't you think it's cruel, Willie?"

He did not answer, but took the eggs and laid them on the ground, shook the dust from his cap, and turned away. He dared not speak because he knew his voice would be shaky; he felt shame at his sopiness. He had disgraced himself.

"Good-bye," he mumbled, and walked, almost ran, away.

A quarter of an hour later, Jack found him with Bill Nye, the crowstarving boy, sitting over his fire in silence. Willie gave no explanation, and Jack was distressed, asking him repeatedly if he had offended him.

"No," said Willie quietly.

"Then I know what it is," asserted his friend. "I told you you were a blinkin' idiot to have anything to do with her. She's gone home in a huff."

Bill Nye, the bare-legged crowstarver, who looked about seven years old so little and thin was he, puckered up his face in a grin. Jack caught his arm, but the boy hoarsely whined, "Nunno, Mas' Temp'ly, doan't ee a-hit on 'im, for gordsake, Mas' Temp'ly, doan't ee do that."

"You mind your own business, d'ye hear?" grunted Jack.

"Ess, Mas' Jack, ess ee wull."

He sprang up, pattered over the ground with bare feet, ragged trousers flapping round his little thin calves, seized a clapper, whirled it vigorously and yelled:

"Ull-oo-oa, Ull-oo-oo-oa."

Jack and Willie sat over the fire talking about many things; about their friendship, about Jack's great climb five years ago when Jim Holloman, the moucher, had lived in the spinney; how they would be friends for ever and ever, and live together when they grew up, never marrying. The white, brilliant sun swung across a wind-washed sky of blue, the larks climbed into the heaven singing their songs the while, and the afternoon grew older.

Soon they left the spinney to Bill Nye, with his clappers, his tins, and his plovers' eggs baked in the fire. The wind had left the earth. Halfway down the right-of-way they passed an oddmedodd erected to scare the rooks, made of an old torn coat stuffed with straw, and an ancient chimney hat. The erection of these figures of desolation was one of the duties of the diminutive human scarecrow. Willie looked at it a moment, lost in reverie, for Jim Holloman used to make the oddmedodds for the big field, and Jim used to live in the spinney. Two people awaited his return to Rookhurst; one of them waited yearningly, with a heart sad and in which a thorn seemed eternally to be.

GOLDYSPINKS

A SWARDED ride in Colonel Tetley's pheasant preserve led through a pine wood to a cleared space where stood a cottage in a large garden. Behind the cottage was an orchard, now in its glory of blossom, bee-flecked and fragrant. In the south wall and surrounded by apricot branches, alcoves held skeps for the bees that from dawn till sunset burred and hovered around their domes of twisted straw. Stares whistled and wheezed on the chimney pots, shaking their wings ; four white fantail pigeons flew about their cot nailed to the tarred kennel-shed where the locally famous strain of retrievers was bred ; and all day and all night in summer a tiny stream broke to pieces with soft music over the stony bed of a deep cool ditch behind the house.

An old man sat under the skeps, facing the sunshine. His cap lay on one knee, and his hands were clasped upon the nobbed end of a great oak stick, polished with age. Sometimes he nodded his head gently. Since dinner time he had been sitting in his high-backed chair, listening to the strains of April's immature orchestra, not yet assembled for the symphony of summer. From the pine wood came the drooling of ringdoves, near at hand the soft cooing of the fantails, the sipping talk of finches, the clear melody of thrushes, and in an undertone the slumbrous hum of tame bees in the orchard and the coarse burring of their wild and duskier brethren in the garden.

Long had he lived there ; but now his beloved rearing-field was guarded by another. Old Bob Lewis had served the Colonel, his father and grandfather, for nearly seventy years. His own father had been keeper before him ; neither had been to London. Now age and feebleness had compelled him to give up his work among the longtails and birds, and a continual house life pressed upon him. Whenever possible, he was out of doors ; otherwise he fretted. He was simple as a flower itself, for so long had Old Bob lived among them, breathed their scents and loved their colours ; he felt stifled in a house, and longed for the open. An old man, without

wife or child, only the thoughts of flower and birds and the dreams that they give to fill his mind.

After the blusterings of the wind the sunshine and the murmur of bees made the garden a place of tranquillity. His head drooped forward till it nearly rested on his clasped hands. A girl came round the wall and called softly to him. He did not hear her. She walked nearer, faced him, thinking that he was asleep: a pity to wake him, but tea was ready. Then two magpies, ill-balanced by long tails, flew over the garden, uttering their harsh cries of *chack-chack-chack*. The old man raised his head, and stared vacantly at her. He had been listening all the while to the bees and birds.

"Tea be ready, Mas' Lewis. Will ee come now?" Her voice was low and sweet.

"Ess, Dolly, surelye. Ban't it a bootiful day, now? Lissen on 'em bumblehums. Blossum'll go fine, reckons. What say, midear?"

"Ess, it'll be gude, shouldn't wonder."

"Ay, don't a sight on um blossom make ee joyful, midear? Reg'lar purty, I calls it."

He peered at her, for the sight of her always pleased him, having no grandchildren of his own to look at.

"You'm allus 'pear so melan-choly, midear. What for should a bootiful maid like ee 'pear so melan-choly? Ah now, hark ee to goldyspinks a-singing-on in orchard."

He turned his head sideways and listened. The far-away sipping notes of the goldfinches rose and fell, coming reedily and wistful above the burring of the bees. The lichened forks of the apple trees were a favourite place in which to weave the fragile nests of moss and hair and dandelion flock, and building had begun. Every stir of wind shook a shower of blossom from the trees, and where the girl stood the rough breezes of the morning had scattered the stained petals on the pathway.

She waited for the old keeper to lift himself from the chair—he would have no help—and the sunlight revealed how faded and frayed of hem was her skirt, how the stockings were patched and even now worn-out at one heel, how the

hands were chapped and roughened by work. She had put on a print blouse in preparation for Sunday. Her clothes were adapted from old costumes given her by her former mistress at Skirr Farm, and the shoes never fitted—they were too big. In her box she had a pair of patent leather shoes, which she had not worn for years ; they were kept for her lover's return.

The bloom was still on the beauty of Dolly. Always her skin had been soft and smooth, and of that rare quality that is enriched by wind and sunshine. Her bosom was firm, with a simplicity of girlish outline ; she had fastened her blouse with a pin, which had loosened and exposed the suntinged flesh moving with her breathing. Her heart was still full of love, her body passionate—both were awaiting the object on whom their lavishment were worthy. But her face had altered during the years of yearning, especially the expression of the eyes. Their child-like innocence—so exquisite a loveliness of brown eyes—had fled, as though her happy and maidenly wonder were drowned deep and for all time within those mournful depths. There was a shadow in them. Her face was thinner, the cheekbones more prominent, the lips not so moist, and coral where they had been red ; sorrow had made the girl into a woman.

About her feet the wind stirred the spilled blossom, the bees hummed their chaunt of nectar and sunshine, and from the orchard came the notes of the finches in golden whispers of song.

“ Hark ee, mideal. Oh, listen-on um ! ”

“ There be great-grammar calling that kettle be boiling,” said Dolly.

“ Ooo ay, like as no. Well, well, in ee goes.”

He heaved out of the high-backed chair, and walked with his great thick stick to the porch round the corner, followed slowly by the brooding girl.

Inside the room a thistly hag was huddled into an old horsehair-and-mahogany arm-chair. She was ninety-five years of age and entitled to such reputation and privilege as is usually attached to the oldest inhabitant. Ten days before each birthday, a young man called upon her and asked

a great number of questions, receiving shrill and irritable replies which exasperated the local representative of the *Colham and District Times* even more than the remarks of Mr. Peleg Golding, his editor. However, he managed to write about Mrs. Nye's hints for the maintenance of a serene longevity and what he imagined she thought about civilisation generally. It was impossible to report her views accurately, for those that were rendered intelligible through reiteration were toothless remarks about "they steam-ingins," "they teeth o ern wot were brukken dwenty-voor year agon," and "that grand-darter o ern wot left lill slaverer fur poor old granmer." Regularly at her birthday Mrs. Cerr-Nore, the wife of the vicar and a cousin-in-law to the Earl of Slepe, paid a visit with a basket containing such delicacies as port wine of the fine old tawny variety stocked by grocers and manufactured during the current year, minced chicken and ham, bramble jelly, cream, a new nightcap, and a pair of bedsocks.

In temperament and in habit Mrs. Nye differed from her nephew who had just entered. Although it was his cottage, she refused to have a window open. She was as active as he was, but rarely went out of the house. Her head was bald and small, and when she removed her woollen cap, it resembled a sun-withered wurzel. Mere shrunkn slits were her eyes, and her nose hooked downwards and her bearded chin curved upwards till they appeared almost to touch.

"Kells byling," she complained, in a thin knaggy voice. "Kells bin byling long time."

"Oo ay, time fur dish o' tea, grammar."

"S'd thenk so, Barb Loos! Kells bin byling this 'arf 'our."

"'As ee naw," replied the old fellow to humour her.

"Aiy, aiy, that e as, Barb Loos. You bin mooning around, you can't keep no reck'ning o time."

"Ah um."

Dolly knelt down and poured the water from the black iron kettle that had just sent its first soft vapour into the chimney. It curved from the notched spout, gurgling an ascendant and hollow scale in the teapot as it rose higher with the swirling tea-leaves.

"Not too much waater!" complained Mrs. Nye. Her head moved sideways like that of a tortoise.

Dolly had placed the teapot on the hob when footsteps shuffled on the stone outside, and a double knock came at the door. She frowned, recognising the knock, and pinned her blouse quickly. Hardly had she done so when the door opened and a big heavy man dressed in a wincey suit smelling of moth ball, and a cap peaked excessively, came into the room.

"Evenun, Mrs. Nye. Evenun, Mr. Lewis. Evenun, Dolly," he said, standing by the door with his cap on his head.

"Evenun," shrilled Mrs. Nye, and immediately started to eat a piece of bread and butter, munching at a quick rate, and making considerable noise in the process of mastication without the aid of teeth.

"Ullo, young feller," greeted Bob. "Ow you bin keepun o late?"

"Nicely, thank you. How be you, Dolly?"

"Well, thank ee, John Fry. Cup o tea, wull ee now?"

"Aiy, aiy."

He removed his cap, and looked round for a place to hang it as the nail behind the door whereon it was usually left was occupied by Bob's cap. He seemed puzzled by this, and, after hesitation, put it in his pocket, then sat at table, and Dolly got him a plate, for which he thanked her stolidly. The primitive preacher was a man who quoted the laws of Moses more often than he laughed; he was reckoned by the villagers to be ungenerous and hard. He had a regular but small audience in the tin chapel. By trade he was a buyer and seller of horses and cattle, and by nature a very shrewd man at a deal. Although in his addresses he condemned publics as places of sin and maintained by the devil, he had no objection to entering the King's Arms and the Cat and Gnatfly in order to settle his bargains. But he was never seen to drink in the village, or to buy drink for any one; he bore occasional chaffing in silence. He was one of those rare men, narrow and bigoted, who believe everything in the Old Testament because it is "in the Bible."

Every Saturday night he came to read from the Old Testament to Mrs. Nye. He loved Dolly, but his love was inseparable from resentment, and wholly selfish. Yet he felt dumbly pained because she did not want to listen to the Bible. He thought that it was in his power to save her soul, and his imagined knowledge of her sin with Jim Holloman made himself infinitely superior to her; he could never understand why she did not love him; nevertheless, he found consolation in the belief that one day she would yield. Till that time, he waited and watched, his passion like a fire that is badly fueled and constructed, sullen and dull. To Dolly he was physically repulsive. He was ugly; his eyebrows and hair were sandy; his hands and eyes were cold like the celluloid collars encircling his neck with their white rubber covering worn and frayed where his chin scraped, and a dirty mark round the edge.

John Fry ate stolidly. Conversation was infrequent. Old Mrs. Nye munched a great quantity of bread and butter; before she had swallowed the last mouthful of one piece she made shrill requests for more. She drank a lot of tea, her brown seamed throat showing every laboured gulp.

Willie and Jack called in at the cottage on their way to Skirr Farm. Dolly brightened when she saw him, and John Fry went on eating. Willie hated him. The preacher's hair was cropped short, and a murrey scar showed on the back of his head where once a vicious mare had bitten him.

Jack sat down on a horsehair-stuffed sofa, refused a piece of cake, and waited patiently for his friend. Willie had insisted upon seeing Bob Lewis, because he wanted to talk about the nesting habits of the raven. The keeper told him that it was a rare visitor to Rookhurst, and that once he had found a nest in the pine wood, when the old birds had attacked him fiercely. During the telling he became excited, and Dolly looked at him tenderly, thinking how wonderful it was for one nearing the end of life to have the joy of a boy. Then she looked at Willie, and felt she would like to kiss him. She did not like Jack—she had been tormented by him when she was maid to his mother. Willie's mother had been kind to her when she was a little girl; she remembered it

even now—one of the things in childhood that had stood out from poverty and often kicks and hunger.

John Fry continued to eat bread and butter, and Mrs. Nye was on the verge of slumber.

In his pocket John Fry had a small Bible, worn at the leathern binding and with grimed pages. He was going to read the weekly chapter of Isaiah to her when he had eaten his tea. Before he had finished there came at the door a hesitant fumbling, and Dolly looked up quickly, but old Mrs. Nye had not heard. She went to the door, opened it, and the stunted figure of Bill Nye slipped in. She gave him some bread and butter and jam, and he ate it like an animal ; ragged fringe of lustreless hair over narrow forehead, black eyes quick as a bird's, wide mouth grinning whenever he glanced at Willie.

"Oo ay," murmured Bob.

"My gord, bant ee a gude un!" he approved, tearing at the food.

"Yew shouldn't take the name of Our Oly Feyther in vain," reproved John Fry, turning to him.

"Oo be yim, mister?" grinned the boy, "I ain't ever seen yim!"

Suddenly the termagant levered herself with skinny silk-smoothed arms from the sagginess of the arm-chair, saw him, and cried querulously :

"Be off on un ; drive un out, lill grawbey!"

Like a shadow that dies with the instant quenching of a light the crowstarver slipped out of the door, frayed trouser-ends and oversize coat flapping round him. Mrs. Nye had never forgiven her dead granddaughter for having had a child out of wedlock.

"Pauper spirit," laughed Jack.

Willie listened to the urchin's whistle as he went out of the garden ; it died away, and faintly through the window came the song-talk of the goldfinches among the apple bloom, softly wistful as they made their love.

THE OPENING OF THE FLOWER

"In the sunshine, by the shady verge of woods, by the sweet waters where the wild dove sips, there alone will thought be found."

Richard Jefferies in *Pigeons at the British Museum*:

SAP

FLEETINGLY another springtime and early summer of the impressionable years passed away. The wind of July, tossing the sappy corn, would sigh no more among the tall meadow grasses and the alien flowers. New ricks rose under slung canvas awnings in the farmyard at Skirr, and upon the air the dried vernal-grass loosened its fragrance—as though in remembrance of the loved meadows it had left for ever.

Willie and Jack hated school and its tyrannies in the hot weather, made only bearable by the bi-weekly games of cricket. Willie was a skilful bowler and in the second eleven. Both he and Jack counted the days till the end of term when a long freedom would be given them. Elsie met Willie as he came out of church one Sunday, and invited him to her birthday party to be held on the following Saturday. He declined, for no reason whatsoever except that he wanted to see if she would look disappointed; and when she tried to persuade him, he persisted in his self-destructive folly and said that homework would prevent him. Then Charlie Cerr-Nore raised his cap to her, and Willie went away, wondering with desperate misery and jealousy why he had been so foolish. Three days before the party he wrote to say that he would come, sending the letter after eighteen previous attempts to achieve a neatness of handwriting that would create a marvelling impression. Saturday morning dragged intolerably at school, with successive visitations to the clumsy and sarcastic Taffy for Electricity and Magnetism, the irritable and raving Ratpoison for French, the jovial Bunny for English, and the torpid Useless for Drawing. After dinner he started on his homework.

Somehow a wild bee had wandered into the room, and its insistent drone dispelled all effort at concentration. The boy sitting at the table gazed at it with a frown, and saw the

wings of the insect, dipped in the ray of sunlight, like a golden and misted net about its dusky body.

He looked again at the book before him, endeavouring to master the fact, loosened upon the world many years ago by the amazing futility of Euclid, that the squares upon the two lesser sides of a right-angled triangle were equal in area to the square upon the hypotenuse. His thoughts ran on:—

It was half-past two and *her* birthday. Would she like the painting he had done for her, two owls on a branch against the moon, with the inscription, *What Owling times we've had together*. Carrambo, he would have to hurry. Curse the rotten geometry. After that was the first four verses of Matthew Arnold's *Strayed Reveller* to be learned by heart. Another two years at school and he would be free of the Old Bird and his frightful lessons, Trig., Virgil, and Euclid. If only he could get a chance to talk to Elsie alone! A squared plus B squared equalled C squared—Book one, proposition forty-seven. *Oh, ma babby, ma curly-headed babby, yer farder's in de cotton fields a-working all de day*. Rot—rot. A squared plus B squared—yes, of course, but that fact had to be proved—*quod erat demonstrandum*. Which was absurd. *Oh, ma babby, ma curly*— That was no good, he *must* hurry and learn Book One, proposition forty-seven, otherwise it was a sure thing that Taffy would give him the whack to-morrow. Jack would be calling for him shortly, he must hurry. *Oh, ma babby*— Oh, *rot*! Why did the beastly thing keep running in his head? Did Elsie love him. . . . Ah! Love was a cruel thing. She was so beautiful and sweet, and he could see her soul in her eyes. What beautiful eyes they were, and how lovely was her plait, like a ripe ear of wheat. Father was digging in the garden; he could see him through the window. Oh, he *must* get on with proposition forty-seven. The holidays were coming shortly, thank Heaven. *Now then*: the angle at the base of an isosceles triangle—dam-dam-dam! That was nothing to do with it. How that bee buzzed around the room. It was lovely outside. A lark was singing in the sky, so sweetly, although the nesting season was over, and the nightingale and cuckoo had long stopped singing. They would shortly

be going across the sea to Africa. The woodlands were empty of song. Already the corn was yellow—almost before he knew it had come, the spring had gone. The wild dog-roses had fallen. It was a sad time. Soon would be autumn. Why did his eyes always fill with tears when he thought of it? Jack's never did, nor Bony's, nor Clemow's. Perhaps Rupert's did. Rupert was a nice boy; he wished himself were like him.

*Over the fallow field crieth a lapwing
Wildly and sweetly,
See-weet, see-o-weet.*

That was better than Arnold's *Strayed Reveller*. All rot, he called it. It ought, as Effish had suggested, to be called the *Depraved Driveller*.

*The gods are happy,
They turn on all sides
Their shining eyes
And see below them
The earth and men.*

They turn on all sides their shining eyes: as though they were searchlights! Rotten stuff. Old Bunny would probably ask him to recite it to-morrow, so he must learn the rest. He might as well chuck Book One, proposition forty-seven, as it would not be remembered.

Oh, ma babby, ma curly-headed babby, yer farder's in de cotton field a-working all de day, oh, ma babby. Carrambo!

*They see Tiresias
Sitting, staff in hand,
On the warm, grassy
Asopus bank,
His robe was drawn over
His old, sightless head,
Revolving inly
The doom of Thebes.*

Oh, how jumbled were the words. That bee wanted to get out into the sunshine, to the flowers. The bee never learned any useless things. No useless labour, no worry, but in the sunshine. Bill Nye was—lucky being—a crow-starver out in the open all day, although they did say that he was a—no, he must not use the word ; it wasn't kind even to think it. A curse on old Mrs. Nye, with her thousand spade guineas in a box under her bed, so Big Will'um said, and not letting little Bill—*oh, ma babby, ma—*

*His old sightless head,
Revolving inly
The——*

When the clock had struck four times, Mr. Maddison came in from the garden.

"Hallo, old man," he said genially, making Willie feel shy, "well, and how has the work gone?"

"Oh, I've mastered my Euclid, thank you, Father, and learned the first three stanzas of The Strayed Driveller."

"The Strayed what did you say?"

"The Strayed Reveller—a poem by Matthew Arnold. Would you like to hear it?"

"Oh, no, that's all right. I've already heard you singing it. I didn't know that Arnold wrote coon songs, though. Perhaps if he had he would have been a better poet. However, I'm sure you have learned your work, as you've said so, and you will thank me when you're older. I don't want to be a slave-driver, my boy. I only want you to do your work properly, so as to train your brain to memorise, deduct, and think, in order to give you a decent chance when later on you enter the struggles of life. In one way, it doesn't matter to me whether you work or not. I should, however, be very sorry to see you in the position of your Uncle Richard in London when you're his age. But I don't want to keep you now that you've done your work. I expect you want to run up and change, and make yourself look smart? Ah, well, I wish you luck!"

And waving his hand, Mr. Maddison disappeared.

"Father isn't so dusty," thought Willie, hopping upstairs to change his clothes.

When he had finished washing in the chipped basin upon his washstand (which resembled many things owing to the fact that it had been painted by himself, with a dozen different colours and shades of paint, but never once properly) his face was glossy and tight, like a blown balloon. It was an easy matter to slip into Father's room and borrow a little oil with which to dominate his hair. Under the mattress lay his best trousers, with permanent turn-ups, pressed but indifferently and curiously rutted where the steel springs had left their impression. Downstairs in the kitchen Biddy waited to see how her lill lamb (a form of address which he disliked intensely) would look. While she was brushing his coat and fussing over him, Mr. Maddison looked round the door, and seeing his clean shiny face, said jocularly:—

"Ah, now you do look a little Sir Tristram with that nice clean face!"

His son muttered, hating him with a flare of resentment. He thought he was inferring that he was soppy.

The great event happened while he and Jack were walking to The Firs. Willie looked up at a swift speeding with thin curve of black wing, its scream infantile and mystical as it pursued a mate.

"Don't they half go, man?" he said. Then his face grew crimson, and suddenly flinging his arms and legs all ways he danced in silent ecstasy.

The first four words had been in his high treble; "go" had been a mere squeak, and "man" was sudden and deep.

"You heard it, man?" he gasped. "You heard it? My voice is broke. I shall be able to leave the altos and join the basses with you under Old Beerface. Good Lord, how wonderful."

"Well, don't make such a fuss about it, Willie. It's about time too, you know. Your sixteen!"

But Willie did not care. His prayer had been answered. He would get a moustache on his lip. He would——

"I say, lend us your razor when my moustache comes, won't you?"

"No wonder old Taffy calls you Dippy Willie," scorned Jack. "Don't take on so just because your voice is broke."

*At Flores
In the Azores
Sir Richard Grenville lay,*

sang Willie, in a faked basso. He hopped about, cracking his fingers and gurgling to himself.

"Oh, shut up," growled Jack, good-naturedly, and secretly pleased because his friend was happy. "You'll have the dogs following you."

"Bah, you stolid old ass," exclaimed Willie in a pure treble—that at any moment he expected to collapse, but it didn't—"bah, old devilskin," and he pushed him into the ditch.

Jack chased, threatening to roll him in the dust. When tired of their horseplay they leaned on a gateway, and saw Dolly just inside the big wheatfield sitting with Bill Nye, small and ragged as ever. Leaping over the gate, they seized the old flintlock with which he was scaring sparrows and finches.

"Bill's got a zgore o' chaffbobs," he grinned, producing chaffinches from his pocket.

"I say, it's a good gun," said Willie, taking the flintlock from Jack. The barrel was thick and rusty, the lock cumbersome and fashioned years ago by some patient gunsmith. Insects had bored into the walnut stock which had lost its polish; the heelplate was of nicked and dented brass, the ramrod a seasoned ash-shaft.

In the excitement of seeing the gun they did not heed Dolly. Her face and neck were lusted by the gipsy-gold of sunshine, her eyes brooding and mournful as ever.

"I say, we'll pinch this," cried Jack to his friend.

"Bailiff lent un," grinned the boy under an oversize and weather-greened slop thrown away by Bob Lewis, "bake un in fire," shuffling the dead birds in his hand.

The duties of a crowstarver ceased when the corn was, as it were, old enough to look after itself: in early February,

unless the winter had been severe. Bill Nye then became a carter's lad, catching the heavy horses at dawn, and taking them to water. As the stalks lost their sappiness and stiffened in summer, he went with the great flintlock to wage war against the granivorous birds. Happened a partridge covey to whirr his way, or a hare to be discovered suddenly in its form, and no one in sight—the hedge provided places for concealment. The flintlock was loaded with a charge of black powder, rammed down by the ash rod and wadded with paper and a double charge of dust shot. Of an old age it belonged, handed down in the bailiff's family, and many cornkippurs had pulled its cumbersome trigger.

The finches it brought down were good to eat. Bill Nye would gobb them—remove the intestines—surround them with clay, and cast them into his fire. Feathers adhered to the baked clay when the shell was broken, and the birds, tender and toothsome, were eaten with perhaps a potato for flavour.

"We must get a gun, man!" exclaimed Willie.

"Or make one as Bevis did, you know, in the book!"

"We must have a battle like they did!"

"Raise an army against Clemow and Hoys!"

"It will be a great adventure!"

"I shall be leader!"

"And I shall be second-in-command!"

"Bill Nye must be our spy!" cried Willie, afire with the idea.

Bill Nye grinned the more. "Aiy, measter, ee'll cut throats for un."

Dolly was looking at Willie and smiling. He felt rather crestfallen, thinking that she was laughing at him. But she was remembering how Jim had liked him.

Soon the two left, talking eagerly. Dolly sat still in the sunshine, staring before her over the waving grain, where the outcast poppies splashed their colour like the dropped scarlet cloaks of corn fairies disturbed at play.

TREMENDOUS ROMANCE

THE friends quickened their pace as they neared The Firs, and opening the gate, they rushed into the house. The party became vitalised by their presence. Success for the gathering of boys and girls was assured from the commencement as those parasites of youthful parties such as *Hot and Cold*, *Grin and Grunt*, and *Find the Thimble*, were not inflicted upon them. Consequently, after the first five minutes an air of abandon began to grow, which assumed eventually such proportion that Jack and Willie, who had the reputation of being swearers and wicked boys, began during tea to flick sultanas and bread pills at their fellow-guests. But nobody minded, and after tea, *Hide-and-Seek* in the garden and anywhere in the house except the bedrooms was played. This continued till it developed into a wild rushing about, when Willie suggested the proper thing, robbers and policemen. All the boys wanted to be robbers, and voted that the girls should be their lawful antagonists. The girls made cries of dissatisfaction; not that they resented being on the side of law and order, but because they wanted to follow the boy-leaders.

"All right," exclaimed Willie, his tie nestling under his left ear, and his face flushed, "right-ho. Let's split up. I'll be the robber captain and old Pigface can be the head of the police."

"Oh, I say, what rot," drawled the parson's son. "Frankly I'm dashed if I want to be a slop."

"Not a slop, Piggiwiggy. You're a tec, don't you see. Armed with revolvers, and wear badges under your coats."

"Oh, yes, let's be deteckertives," yelled the smaller brother.

They chose sides. Willie, as leader of the robbers, was given first choice.

"Jack," he said.

Cerr-Nore, otherwise Old Pigface, so called on account of a long and pallid nose, little colourless eyes, and a chin

that looked as though it had been swallowed accidentally, chose Elsie.

"Oh, rot, you must choose a man first. Leave the girls till last."

"Oh, no, it isn't fair, Willie!" they reproached.

"The more important things are left till last," he answered with an abandon that the tipsy cake had given him, "besides, you're all to be queens, and we choose the common private first, eh, Jack?"

"Of course," his friend supported him.

So the chief detective selected a man, and Willie's pulse steadied. When the sides were chosen, he outlined the scheme. The robbers were to raid the house. In the middle of the raid, the alarm would be sounded, and the police dash out and attempt capture. No fists, of course. The robbers would put up a running fight, and retreat to their stronghold. The detectives were not to throw bricks. Then there would be a siege. His voice croaked just as he finished, and he noticed with a fierce joy that Elsie was looking at him with parted lips and admiring eyes. He thought it was because of the break.

The police retired to get paper stars pinned to their coats, and the robbers thronged round Willie, the girls talking to him eagerly. He felt himself to be appreciated at his proper worth at last.

Mr. and Mrs. Norman had gone out for a walk, believing that their presence might spoil the young people's pleasure.

"We must make a proper raid," gabbled Willie, "carry off cushions, I votes. First of all, I will knight you all. Kneel down on one knee, and let me touch you with this stick. That's right. No, not the girls; they are the automatic spouses of the knights. Arise, Sir Jack Temperley—go on, get up, man. Stand over there. A little drill must follow. Arise, Sir Christopher Margent. Join Jack, there's a sport. Arise, Sir Whatever-your-blinkin'-name is——"

"Percy Pringle, please, Willie." He was the youngest son of the doctor.

"Right-ho, hop up, Sir Percy Pickle——"

"I say, you are *funny*," the girls chorused.

"Who, me?" he grinned, scratching his ear.

"Yes, *you*, Willie," they chirped.

He giggled with excitement.

"Now then, we have one varlet left. What's your name?"

"Please, Willie, it's the same as yours."

"What's your surname?"

"Riddle."

"Well, do you know any good ones?"

"No, please, Willie."

The little boy was kneeling timorously before him. He touched him with his stick.

"Arise, Sir Bonyparte Dumdiddle."

They screamed with delight; the new knight joined the others. He was eight years old.

"What's next?" they called out.

"The raid," he whispered.

They crept forward. The detectives were nowhere in sight. Stealthily they entered the house through the open french windows. They seized cushions and chairs, hats and coats, and anything that was easily removable and not breakable.

"Hook it, or we'll be trapped," Willie tried to hiss.

The detectives met them as they were hooking it. With wild yells, they attacked them. A struggle followed. The girls pulled the coat-tails of their men's attackers, and danced round excitedly. Somebody hurled a bun at Willie and hit him in the eye. It was Cerr-Nore.

"Hey, you rotter, that isn't fair," he yelled, throwing the bun back and hitting his rival on the nose.

The two started to fight. Piggy wrestled furiously, so Willie made all endeavour to overcome him. Unfortunately the chief detective's collar was wrenched off in the affray, which seemed to annoy him to the extent of madness, and Willie found himself looking at bright sidereal objects dancing in utter blackness. Hardly had he time to regard them when they vanished and gave place to a creaking thump on his nose that made him feel as though he were trying to breathe at the bottom of the sea.

"Retreat, Retreat!" yelled Jack from somewhere far

away, and many feet scampered over the green turf to the summer house at the bottom of the garden.

"You dirty swine," swore Willie at Cerr-Nore, "to punch like that."

"Well, you nearly choked me and look at my collar and tie," gasped the other.

Through his other eye Willie regarded his broken and crumpled collar, and a tartan tie that was nearly throttling him.

"No excuse, you blue-blooded hedge-pig!" sneered Willie, "dirty loafer, punching suddenly. Low-down odd-medodd."

"Puny puppy," scoffed the other, "thin skelly-ratface. Floppy owleyes."

"Who's a ratface?"

"You are!"

"Pig—soppy pig—pig!"

They started to fight. Willie gave the clergyman's boy a savage punch on the forehead and then closed with him. They rolled on the floor, panting, snarling, and twisting, each trying his utmost to overcome the other.

"Oo-er!" cried a startled voice.

Clara, the kitchen maid, was looking at the struggling boys. A flower pot crashed over. Clara dared not speak. She was a simple little soul, who lived in the hope of a fine gentleman, told by his father "never more to darken the family portals," coming to Rookhurst in a dying state and herself nursing him; this happened always in the *Family Reader* serials which she, with glowing heart and squinting eyes, read at night.

Clara ran into the kitchen and told the cook what was happening.

"'Tain't no business of our'n," said that woman. "My sister wot keeps a boarding-house in Lunnon 'as similar goings-on, I believe. That's wot blue blood doos, swears and knocks over flower pots when they're invited into the domiciles of others."

The sound of blows and gaspy swearing floated through the open door.

"Oo-er!" cried Clara, hand to mouth, and eyes with an alarmed roundness.

"Oh, you blinking cad," groaned a voice.

"That's that there Willie," sniffed cook. "Young rip, true as kiss yer 'and."

There was the sound of another crash.

"Take that!" shouted Willie's voice, hoarse with satisfaction.

"Oo-er, wot awful swearing," whispered Clara, yet listening rapturously to the reply of an earl's second cousin.

A figure darted past the kitchen door and rushed upstairs, the bigger boy after him. The bathroom door slammed.

Cerr-Nore crept downstairs, and met the others running across the lawn.

"Where's Willie? Why didn't you come? Oh, *look* at his collar! Oh, Piggy, you've been fightin'! Where's your collar?"

These and a dozen other questions were asked him. He began an explanation.

"Frankly, Maddison and I have been having an argument. One of his most convincing arguments, apparently, lies on the floor down there. My collar. Frankly, I don't so much mind my clothes being ripped as being insulted in another cove's house. Mind you, I don't want to split. Far from it. Only it's a bit thick. He's a cowtick."

"But where's Willie?" cried Elsie.

Piggy smiled.

"Oh, he's—he's hooked it. Frankly, I challenged him"

"Do you mean to say he's funky?" gasped Sir Percy Pickle, in alarm.

Charlie eyed him disdainfully, and in turn Sir Percy frowned at Sir Bonyparte, who ran away.

Charlie began to reconstruct the fight. The others crowded round him on the lawn. Jack was silent.

"I got him a smack in the left optic, so—wallop! Frankly, that made him squint. Then my collar descended in profundis, and I caught a stinging left under the lug. But I got one back, right on the conk. Then he flew at me like a gorilla and we started."

A slight noise came from overhead. No one except Jack noticed it. Stealthily he looked up.

"I thought so," he joyed. "Trust old Willie."

"Oh, it'll spoil the party," lamented Peggy Temperley.

"Oh, rot," scoffed the other, "though I don't suppose he'll come back. Frankly, there's going to be a row if he does. The last word hasn't been said, not by a long chalk. He owes me an apology for being a scug, and one to Mr. Norman, our host, as well."

"Oh, rot," said Jack, who had caught a signal from Willie, and interpreted it that he wanted to keep the argument going a little longer.

Cerr-Nore looked at him languidly.

"Perhaps you can't understand," he drawled.

Jack knew that he was looked down upon for being a farmer's son.

"Oh, I say, don't quarrel, you two," urged Elsie. "Let's come and have another game. I wonder where Willie is. Charlie, will you let him off a hiding, for my sake?"

A gasp from above, but in the excitement it was unnoticed.

He looked at her and was not able to resist her pleading. He also cherished a little dream which gave him faint melancholy at times.

"Frankly, I don't want to bullyrag a chap. I dare say he's had enough."

"Bah, Pigface," some one hissed, as though in great pain, and a pail of cold water descended from the upper window upon him.

The others roared. Sir Percy Pickle danced. Jack rolled on the grass like a dog. Cerr-Nore spluttered and cursed.

"Oh, the devilish bounder," he jerked out.

"Who's a funk?" mocked Willie.

"You wait!" the other yelled, and then realising the celebrity attached to his position, he started to laugh.

"What a rag!" he chuckled. "Good for old Willie!"

"Oh, no," cried Willie, "you've won really. It was a rotten trick to douse you, Charlie. By Jove, can't you fight!"

"Frankly, you nearly killed me," replied the other, not to be outdone.

Willie left the window and joined the others.

"I apologise, Piggy," he said, holding out his hand.

"Oh, rot, Weary. It's my fault. Frankly, I lost my temper. And I did bung a bun at you and hit you first. Rather a rotten thing to do, frankly."

"I hit you back with it."

"Well, I'm sorry. Also, I'm devilish wet. Do you accept my apology?"

"You must accept mine first. I'm in the wrong."

"Oh, rot. I am, I tell you."

"No, you're not. I'm sorry. It's my place——"

"Frankly, I don't want——"

"Shut up, and listen to——"

"I shan't shut up!"

"Don't shout then! Can't you——"

"Stop it!" cried Elsie. "You're both big sillies. Shake hands."

"Look at Pickles!" said Willie.

Sir Percy Pickles and one of the smaller Cerr-Nores had started to scrap on the grass, having quarrelled over their leaders.

Willie and Charlie dragged them to their feet, and booted them apart.

Cerr-Nore changed into a suit of Mr. Norman's, and came down with a tweed coat loose around his thin body, and trousers that submerged his boots.

After tea, the merriment went on, watched by hungry eyes through the hedge. They had *Wrestling Matches*, *Tilting*, *Thump 'Im*, and *Pillow Fights*.

During a game of *Hide-and-Seek* Willie and Elsie sought the summer-house. Very daringly he led her there by the hand. They sat in quietude and near to each other.

The flood-tide of day had been draining from the sky since the sun had plunged into the western horizon, and its clear waters left a blue profound, on whose bed gleamed a great pearl, the evening star of Jupiter. It was the time when the thoughts of men turned to the departing light with a reverence that had outlasted all the religions, thoughts that remained during the building and the crumbling of

civilisations. The birds had the same impulse, and their vesperal song swelled from bush and treetop. Ebbing slowly, the light-tide revealed other jewels on the heavenly shores.

Willie's throat was dry. For two minutes he had tried to force himself to ask a question, but he had not the courage. He had the awful impertinence to desire her photograph. She had promised him one years ago, only the asking had not been such a difficult matter then ; he had never received it. With a pessimism that had its base upon a conviction of self-worthlessness, he imagined that she would be offended if he asked. Elsie glanced at him and flipped his hand with her handkerchief.

" Funny Willie ! " she whispered coyly.

" Why ? " huskily.

" Oh, you are. Do you like Charlie Nore ? "

" He isn't a bad chap. Rather stuck up, just because he's the cousin of an earl."

" Oh, he isn't really stuck-up, Willie. He's an awfully nice boy ! He often comes to see Daddy. More times than you do." She paused, and then, " We must be going in soon, I suppose."

" Elsie ! "

" How hoarse you are, Willie. Have you caught cold ? "

" No."

" What were you going to say ? "

" Oh, nothing."

She sighed, and looked away.

" We must be going in soon, Willie."

In misery he looked at the ground.

" Elsie ! "

" Yes ? " With pain he saw how soft were her eyes.

" You promised me your photo," he gulped.

" Did I ? When ? " Her eyes were wide as though with astonishment.

" Years ago, and again this year when I climbed the rookery."

" Oh."

" Will you ? "

" I haven't had any taken lately."

"Oh, all right then."

From the house they could hear the shouts of the others. They seemed to be playing a vigorous game. Cries of "Stick it, Piggy." "Oh, Jack, you naughty boy," came to them.

"Willie, you do look gloomy. What's the matter?"

Again she flipped with her handkerchief, scented with lavender water, and then placed it against her lips.

"We must be going in soon, Willie. The others'll wonder where we've got to."

"Do you think they'll think anything?"

His boldness amazed himself.

"It doesn't matter if they do."

What did she mean now? He felt a warmth around his heart.

"Elsie, do you remember when I came here, quite a kid, after I had run away from home and been out three nights? Good Heavens, how the time flies. It's five years ago. Isn't it awful!"

"Yes, I remember," the girl replied, "of course I do. Why?"

They sat in silence. Something stirred in the bushes, something that peeped forth like a white blur.

"Don't sigh like that, Willie." Her fingertips touched his hand. He pressed it to his knee, lest its trembling should be felt.

"We ought to be going in," she said presently, very softly, and smiling at him. But she did not move.

"Yes, come on," he quavered.

So they went out of the summer-house. The garden was shadowy, while above glimmered the jewels of night, thrown and scattered as by some titan hurling ages since.

Just by the open windows, she nudged him and said:

"Perhaps I'll give you a photo, Willie."

"Oh, Elsie," he muttered, and stopped, but serenely she had entered the room.

"Ha! Just in time for supper," cried Mr. Norman. "Where have you been?"

"Oh, outside."

Supper was a riotous meal. In the middle of it a small

face peered round the open window. Immediately Cerr-Nore leapt up, followed by Jack; the others paused in astonishment.

They could not catch the intruder. He doubled and sped like a rabbit across the lawn, round the paths, whimpering as he ran. He wore an enormous slop, which made him look like an animated toadstool. His trousers were tied up with string. Up and down he darted. At last Cerr-Nore collared him and he started to cry.

"Durdn't mean no harm, only wanted tew zee," he wailed.

"It's Bill Nye," snorted Jack.

"Bring him in," cried Mr. Norman sternly.

They led him in, frog-marched. His feet were dusty, and the tears made gray smears down his face. On seeing Willie he stopped wailing, and grinned.

"Whatever next?" cried Mrs. Norman, in amazement.

"Friend of yours, Willie?" asked Mr. Norman.

"I know him," replied Willie, ashamed.

"Then he's welcome to supper. Show the gentleman where he can wash his hands. He can have all the cake he wants, and—heavens!"

Bill Nye had seized a cake, and slipped out into the garden. He remembered how his Granmer used to put the soap in his eyes and mouth when a little boy, to make him good and to stop his swearing.

They searched but could not find him, nor did any sound of him come in the stillness of the summer evening when they paused to listen.

It was a wonderful party. Willie and Jack left soon after midnight. They said a reluctant good-night at Skirr Farm, unhappy to be leaving each other, even for a night.

The stars were brilliant in heaven as Willie went homeward, startling a hare that came padding down the road. The hare had gone along the road for years. Jim Holloman had known it. The boy felt unhappy that the animal was afraid of him. He sighed, and thought that he was foolish. This feeling was replaced by one of joy as he recalled the events of the day—it was the great day of his life. His

voice had broken, he had scored off his rival, Elsie had promised him her photograph, and therefore she must love him, and Bill Nye had got a good cake to eat.

He stopped by a gate to watch the stars, all his friends. Aquila the Eagle was sweeping in everlasting flight after Pegasus the Winged Horse; there, too, were Draco the Dragon and Sagittarius the Archer. Low above the downs was Capella, a faithful friend.

"And there's Spica Virginis, my very own!" he thrilled, looking to the western horizon at a large star with faint green shine like a glow-worm. For some minutes his eyes regarded its pure light; he sighed and went homewards.

Mr. Maddison had waited up, and surprised him by asking quietly how he had enjoyed the party.

"All right, thank you, Father," Willie said, and then crept upstairs. Mr. Maddison turned down the lamp, watched its feeble fluttering to extinction, and then followed him up the creaking stairs, passing his son's open door without a word.

FREEDOM

DURING the summer holidays, a pageant of golden days and happiness with Jack, Willie's voice changed completely and a dark smudge came above his upper lip. When he looked in the mirror it appeared to him as though his neck were rising like the stalk of a cauliflower from his collar. The sleeves of his jackets shrunk up the arms as though in shame of their whiskered cuffs. Whenever he saw Elsie he felt ashamed of his old clothes, and became shyer than ever in her presence. Upon one occasion in the last week of August, when the reaping of the big wheat-field had commenced, she told him that she was going to a Belgian convent in September. To Willie the news was so devastating that he could not speak; mechanically his eyes followed the movements of a common sparrow chasing a cabbage butterfly in the garden.

"It will be an awful adventure, Willie. My friend Mary

Ogilvie, who lives at Speering, you know, is coming with me. My father knows her great-uncle. You don't like her, do you?"

"Huh," he swallowed, staring at the sparrow.

"Well, she likes you. The convent only has holidays once a year, in the summer. Won't it be awful, Willie. Mère Augustine, that's the name of the Head Mistress, came the other day, in a nun's clothes. Her face is kind."

Willie sighed and turned away. Suddenly to him came a suicidal feeling: should he smash every window in the house just to destroy absolutely all his hopes?

"Mother says I can have my photo taken before I go away. Would you like one? I promised you one, didn't I?"

"Oh, don't trouble about that."

Elsie leapt out of the hammock.

"But I thought you wanted one so badly, Willie," she cried, going near to him.

"Give it to Pigface."

"But I don't want to give one to Charlie."

He kicked a piece of turf into the air.

"Why, what's the matter, Willie?" she asked, distressed at his abruptness.

"Oh, nothing."

"But there must be something the matter. I say, you've got a moustache coming."

"Huh."

"Father says you're beginning to develop mentally. Are you? He said you would be clever, one day. But I always thought you were clever, you know. Mother says you've got a taste for funny companions. First it was Jim, then Dolly, and now that ragged boy who stole the cake at our party. I saw him in your old breeches the other day. He was a sight! You'll have a slice of cake now, won't you? Are you going to Jack's? Peggy and Doris are coming over to have tea this afternoon."

"Oh, are they. Jack and me are going on a secret expedition."

"Let us come, too!"

"No girls could do what we're going to do. Besides, it's dangerous."

"Well, we can do what you can. We won't make a noise, and we promise to obey you."

"I should jolly well think you would! But I shan't let you come. Jack and me are planning a battle, and making our secret headquarters."

"Up a tree?"

"Just like a girl to wheedle information out of a chap!" ("I've gone mad," a voice whispered within himself.)

"Pouff, I don't want to know."

"Then why did you ask?"

"I think you are *horrid*, Willie! Not a bit like you used to be."

And with an offended air she went into the house, leaving him standing there.

Willie felt that he was dreaming. He pulled his ear. He pinched his nose. He felt in his pocket, and took out a copy of Cæsar's *de Bello Gallico*, which had been set for a holiday task. It had been placed in his pocket that morning, in order to deceive his father. He had a desire to throw it among the gooseberry bushes, but remembered that he would be charged with another when he returned to school; besides, it was marked with some private aids of his own that facilitated translation.

"Why did I do it?" he gasped. "Carrambo." He addressed the empty hammock, punched himself on the ear, and ran away, thoroughly miserable.

On seeing him Jack whooped with delight, and led the way upstairs into the bedroom, which was also his workshop. Jack always had a hobby, and over his table the remains of past enthusiasms were scattered. A dark lantern covered with dust, with the red glass missing, told of a dead passion for photography, which had been kindled when one of the Golding boys had sold him a battered camera for three shillings; a bargain indeed for Golding, as the same morning he had wheedled it from a smaller boy for three faked Cape Triangular stamps and a torn paper copy of the *Thudden-blunder Series* of literature. Over his bed was pasted a long

blurred streak, one of the results of that passion, under which he had printed in rough characters *My Old Pard Willie*. Broken test-tubes and a pair of crucible tongs, tarnished with much heating in bunsen burners, remarked the epoch when chemistry had been pursued furiously, and weird and secret passions brewed. A bottle full of dried and caked curing compound was all that remained of incursions into taxidermy; a torn butterfly net and seven withered butterflies pinned forlornly on cardboard and neglected on his shelf seemed to indicate that expeditions with the C.G.S.N.H.-A.F.B.C. were not entirely wasted.

A vice was fitted to the table, and in this was fixed a piece of a tree. He had been working on it all the morning. A litter of chips and pith was on the floor.

"It's a stock for our gun, man," he informed his friend. "John the blacksmith has got an old percussion cap single bore he'll sell for seven bob."

"Carrambo," murmured Willie at such a vast sum.

"It's worth it, if only we can get the tin. I've seen it. Just think of the duck we can shoot in winter. Good lord, have you brought a blooming Cæsar out with you? Surely you don't mean to say you're going to do your holiday task?" he cried in alarm.

"Should think not!" snorted his friend. "I brought this out to kid my guv-nor."

"Oh, I see," and the other sighed with relief. "Well, we can get some powder—father's got a bag full of dust shot in the attic over the stables and we can melt that down. I've been reading how to make shot. For the size we want, we'll have to drop it white-hot from a height of seventy feet into cold water."

"Um. Get old Snorer to give us permission to use his church, eh? Or climb the rookery and start a fire up there."

"Don't be so sarcastic, Willie. I don't like it. You copy it from Pigface, you know."

"Liar!"

"All right, keep your wool on. Only be serious. You don't seem very keen on the idea of the gun."

"Liar! You wait and see! You and me are going to

have some adventures before we've finished. I've been thinking over our battle. We will draw up a challenge, to Clemow and Hoys, and collect an army. One Wednesday afternoon we'll fight them! We can have our headquarters in the spinney, and send Bill Nye up a tree to scout for us. Ripping, eh, man? And then that island in the lake we're going to visit, we must make a hut on there where we can retreat, if necessary, and defy the whole world. Oh, Jack, I'm so glad we're friends!"

"So'm I, man," yelled the other. "You and me's going to be friends for ever and ever. We're never going to quarrel."

"Jack, let's swear a bond of blood between us."

"Right-ho. Cut our arms and suck one another's blood!"

"As the Ichiargo Indians do!"

"I don't know anything about them. Still, if you like."

"Where's a saw to open our veins?"

"Steady on, Willie! You don't want to cut your arm off."

But Willie was tearing off his undersized coat. He seized the meat-saw that was Jack's own property, its age rendering it without use to the household, and touched the big vein of his forearm.

"Not sharp enough. A chisel will do."

But the chisel was an ugly looking instrument.

"I know," he said. "A white-hot darning-needle's the thing."

"Not for me, anyway," decided Jack.

"Well then, an auger."

"Get blood-poisoning."

"All right, then! A needle!"

So a needle drew a minute bead of blood from their arms, which was sucked religiously by the other.

"I swear," said Willie solemnly, "to stick to Jack through thick and thin, fire and tempest, Ratpoison and the Old Bird, and never to desert him for another boy."

"And I swear," echoed his friend, trying to remember a magnificent oath he had read of in a book, "I swear to

stick up for Willie in fire and water, blood and bones, and to jolly well paste any swab that tries to put it acrost him."

"Thank you," replied Willie, "but I can look after myself."

"Liar! You know jolly well you're no fighter. You've got brains instead."

"Brains aren't any good. I don't want to be like the Old Bird."

"Aren't you going to be captain in the battle?"

"Am I?"

"Of course you are!"

"You sure you don't mind. You would make a better captain, Jack."

"No, I shouldn't. You are captain."

"Very well then. I swear to protect you with my strategical plans."

"Your what?"

"You know, what Bonyparte did."

"You mean stratty—stratty—strattyficalional——"

"Poo, you can't pronounce it. Any one would know that *you* haven't swallowed a directory."

"Ha, laugh at Willie!" jeered Jack. "'Swallowed a directory!' Any fool knows that it is dictionary! Laugh at Willie!"

"It was a slip of the tongue. I meant to say dictionary."

"Well, don't get ratty about it. Keep your wool on."

"I'm not getting ratty, you fool."

"Liar! Just look at you now, then!"

"Liar!"

"All right then, be as rude as you like. Mother says you're the rudest boy she knows. She says——"

"Jack," interrupted Willie, in a quiet voice, "do you mean to say that you back-bite your friend like that, and talk about him behind his back——"

"Now don't be silly, Willie. You know——"

"Very well then, I will go away. I apologise for my rudeness. Good-bye, Jack. I wish you jolly good luck in the world. Sorry I'm so rude. Good-bye. Look, I spit your blood up."

He went out of the room. Jack followed, urging him in a distressed voice to consider seriously. But Willie went out of the house.

"I say, man, I'm sorry that I annoyed you," cried Jack, "but I didn't mean to. I'm a silly fool to say such things. Mother didn't mean it to be nasty, you know that. Look here, let's make it up; it's so silly to quarrel. Where are you going to, Willie?"

"Bony Watson's," replied the other in a cold voice.

Jack stopped. Willie looked at him. He had gone white in the face. A pain was in Willie's heart, but he joyed in it.

"You mean that?" gasped Jack.

"No," said Willie, "but it was a test to your friendship."

"Then you're joking, old Willie?" Jack's cheeks were red.

"Of course!"

"Hurray! Let's shake hands. Good for Willie!"

"I'm sorry I was such a beast, Jack. But I didn't really spit your blood out. I only pretended. I'm sorry I was nasty."

"It was my fault."

They shook hands and went across the meadow towards the large lake, known as the longpond. But remembering that they needed implements for the secret expedition, they returned to the farm to get them.

The night before Jack had taken the stag's head from its nail, and removed the remainder of the tow. Years ago he had raided this secret store, and left the head leering drunkenly to one side; his father had thrashed him. Cunning had increased with age, however, and Willie chuckled as Jack told him that if ever he required tow from the head, whether for seam-caulking of boats, or for wigs at Christmas parties, he would find it stuffed neatly with shreds of a *Colham and District Times*.

Under their coats they carried the meat-saw, a small chopper, a compass, a telescope, a bottle of home-made gunpowder (very harmless stuff—"for blasting purposes"), a hammer; and nails in their pockets.

The labour and anxiety entailed by the stealing of the tow was wasted, the birchbark boat under the boathouse by the lake being firmly in the mud. They could not even shift it.

"We shall have to use the blinking catamaran after all," grumbled Willie.

"Remember what they say about the ghost and the catamaran?" asked Jack nervously.

Tradition said that death by drowning would be the fate of any one who ventured upon the water in the catamaran. Years ago the Colonel's young wife had committed suicide in the lake. Many people had seen her ghost at night, a white wraith gliding over the stillness. Since that time the boathouse had fallen into ruin, the boats been neglected; Willie and Jack had used one until it was discovered one morning to be missing. Granfer Will'um the bailiff's father, had held the opinion that a ghostie had zunk un, and that the boats were harnted. They had been frightened, and avoided the lake; they were little at the time, of course.

The catamaran was still serviceable. It was made of two long floats, hollow, held together by cross-pieces and two seats, and propelled by paddles.

"Looks a bit unsafe, you know, Jack!"

"Oh, that'll be all right, man. The great thing is to avoid being seen while we are going there. What shall we call the island?"

Willie considered.

"Skull Fortress!"

"No, that's silly. How about Mungrumswoo?"

"Whatever's that?"

"A secret island inhabited by Ichiargo Indians."

"Poof, silly ass," laughed Willie, pretending that it was a good one against himself, and so to please Jack.

"No, seriously," condescended Jack, "what shall we call it?"

"Let's get there first. Look, there's smoke coming from far among the trees! The island's inhabited! Who can it be?"

A vapour lay over the calm water, hiding the rim of the

island from which arose trees seemingly baseless. Jack, however, could see no sign of inhabitation. Neither could Willie, really.

"Oh, lord, I hope no one's bagged it first, Jack! Supposing Clemow and Hoys have pinched it!"

"Or Bony Watson. He's a crafty devil."

They peered under their hands again.

"Perhaps it's only mist. Let's go and see."

They crept into the mouldering boathouse. Spiders' webs hung dismally in the corners, filled with the torn membranes of flies and the larger wings of raped moths.

"I hate spiders," said Willie, "nasty ruthless beasts. I say, Jack, look at this one's glinting eyes, and hairy legs."

"Looks like Ratpoison, doesn't it?"

"Yes," said Willie, smashing it with his stick. The big hairy thing fell spreadeagled on the tiled floor. They looked up as a clear whistle sounded through the door.

"A kingfisher!"

They ran outside, but the bird had gone, a sapphire line drawn through the faint silver mist. The catamaran was tied to a rusty ring. They hacked the rope through with their knives, unable to wait and untie the knot. Willie clambered on one float, and it sunk into the mud. Black slime and bubbles came up. He sat on the seat. Jack pushed with the paddle, and gradually it slid into deeper water.

"Come on, man," said Willie, "it's ripping. It's quite safe."

Jack clambered on board.

"Let me paddle," cried Willie.

"Oh, that's all right, Willie."

"Come on, man. I can do it better'n you can."

"Liar, you can't."

"Keep a smart look out," whispered the other, "no one must know where we're going to. Just think of the time we can have on the island. Why, we can stock it with provisions and hop it any time we like, and no one be any the wiser."

"Ra-ther. And we can have it for headquarters tent in the battle!"

"Well, hardly," replied Willie scornfully.

"I meant if we're routed," admitted Jack lamely.

"Oh, yes, in that case it would come in useful."

For ten minutes they heaved through the water; then Willie paused. The catamaran glided forward, pushing little ripples away from its sharp prows. The lake was silent, the water deep and shining. Sometime a deep cronk came from hidden moorhens, and once a large carp leapt among the water lilies and set their green cool leaves rocking and running with globules of water. From far away came the whirring of the reaper-and-binders. The boys looked into the water, each with his own thoughts. Silence and the faint rattling of the machines and the misted distances around them made Willie a little sorrowful, why, he could not tell. He glanced at Jack, while the streams from the poised paddles broke into drops and plashed musically upon the skyey surface.

"Jack."

"Yes, Willie?"

"What are you thinking about?"

"Oh, nothing."

"Yes, you were. Tell me."

"You'd laugh, Willie."

"No, I shouldn't, Jack."

"Promise?"

"Yes."

"All right then. I was thinking—oh, you'll think me soppy."

"No, I shan't."

"All right then. I was thinking about what you said about going to Bony Watson's."

"But I didn't mean it, Jack."

"No, but it hurt me considerable. Honestly, Willie, if I thought that you *could* do such a thing, I should kill myself."

"Oh, Jack, don't say that." And Willie's heart was warm.

"I shall, Willie."

"Jack, I'm sorry. I like you, you know I do."

"As much as you like Rupert, or Macarthy, or Bony?"

"Pouff, *they're* only ac—ac—just ordinary friends."

"And Elsie!"

"Oh, it's all over. I've killed her love by now. And you know, Jack, I *did* love her. Didn't I?"

He leaned forward, his eyes moist with sentiment.

"Yes, you did, Willie. Why, of course, I *can't* guess."

"It's over, Jack. In a way, it's a tragedy. I tell you, because you're my friend, and understand. After all, what have I done in my life? Nothing at all! Why, I haven't even learned to dive! I'm a water-funk."

"But why do you want to do something with your life?"

"Oh, I don't know, but I wish I could do something with it. I can't explain, but I think—that is, I wish—well, I wish the Boer War was still on and I'd go for a trumpeter. I'm sick of Ratpoison, and the old Bird, and Taffy clumping my head with his great beefy hands. Then there's Father—he won't let me do anything. I got a hiding, as you know, for having that horse pistol. Although I knew the beastly thing would go off suddenly and blow a hole through the window! Then he says he'll smash up my eggs, and forbid me to see you; all because I don't do any homework. Pills to all homework, say I, and as for blinking Cæsar as a holiday task, it's all wrong. That's what I think of the Old Bird"—and he threw his book into the water.

"Hist," breathed Jack a moment later.

"What is it?"

"Quiet! Don't muck me. I spot a hostile foe."

He took the telescope from his pocket and focussed it upon an object walking by the edge of the lake.

"It's the Old Bird," he gasped.

"Shut up, is it really?"

"Yes, I tell you! What's he doing here?"

"Bunk, man! Into the island. Let me pick up the Cæsar, for the lord's sake. He's probably seen me."

"He's too far, Willie. He's walking on. Let's be still and pretend we're a log floating."

Willie salved the dripping *de Bello Gallico* from the water and put it in his pocket. The figure passed behind the trees, and they looked at one another.

"Rotten, eh man, him coming here?"

"In the holidays, too."

They snorted, and for five minutes they were gloomy.

"You have a go," said Willie, handing over the paddles. His sleeves were wet where the water ran down from the blades.

Jack sent the catamaran along with steady thrusts, and soon they came to the island. It was about fifty yards across, and on one side was a small beach grown with sedges and water-plantains. A mollern rose flapping into the air as the twin floats grated gently on the beach among the shiny pebbles and mussel-shells.

"Hurrray," shouted Willie, "here we are. Look, he dropped a feather. Bags it, I saw it first! We'll call the island Heron's Plume Island, eh?"

"Good for you, Willie."

They jumped on to the shingle and pulled up their vessel beyond the water line.

"In case a typhoon springs up" insisted Willie.

"What a gorgeous island," cried Jack. "Here's your mollern's feather. Fine, isn't it—make a fine float for roach. Come on, Willie!"

They pushed through the brambles and thick undergrowth into the heart of the island. A blackbird fluttered away, shrilling an alarm. Elderberry trees, planted by birds grew thickly with the willows and alders. At the farther edge a great ash covered with damp moss had fallen into the water, and green rushes hid skulking moorfowl.

"Ripping, ripping," yelled Willie. "Why didn't we come here before?"

"We must clear away these bushes," replied Jack, already hacking with the little chopper and sending white chips flying. "You take the saw and cut down that elderberry. We must pinch some hay and bring it over. We'll build a hut."

"We'll line it with bracken. And make it watertight. Oh, how lovely. I'll get a blanket out of old Biddy; she'll do anything for me. If we dip it in linseed oil, it'll make it waterproof. And we'll fry bacon and eggs out here."

"Bring the gun when we've bought it and shoot pigeons."

"And that heron."

"We'll stuff it and give it to Old Useless!"

"Won't we make Clemow and Hoys jealous!"

"Us'll buy the gun to-night from John the blacksmith!"

"But we want some money."

"Of course."

They stared at one another.

"It's beastly without money, isn't it, Jack?"

Jack agreed, and spat reflectively at a brown spider hanging in the centre of its web. He missed.

"There's only one thing," went on Willie, "we must bag Bill Nye's gun."

"Big Will'um would tell the guv'nor."

"We must bribe Bill Nye."

"Or hoof the beggar's pants!"

"No, I don't believe in hoofing an inferior's pants in order to achieve anything"—Willie felt pleased with his sudden eloquence—"I believe in kindness. Look at Old Scratch at school. He's a gentleman. The chaps like him. But do they like a master, who, meta—metaphysically speaking, is eternally booting their pants? Of course they don't. That is why Ratpoison is such an utter failure. Mind you, I don't want to dogmatise"—Willie remembered a word out of a Victorian novel he had glanced at in a wandering moment—"I don't want to dogmatise, but what did the Old Bird say——?"

"What did Gladstone say in seventy-seven?" mocked Jack. "I say, chuck it, man, for goodness gracious sake. Cut that bough down with your saw. We can make a hut here. I suggest——"

"——say about that mental power? What is he saying to us——?"

"Chuck it, Maddison. Leave the Bird out of it. We ought to be able to pinch a truss of hay without Big Will'um knowing, and then——"

"Shut up! Listen to me. What is the good of Trigonometry and Euclid? They injure a boy's thinking apparatus. They——"

"Oh, shut up, Willie. What's come over you? Any one would think you were a master or suthin' as terrible. We're on holiday."

"Lord, you *are* a pauper-spirit! The Bird is quite right. You can't face a decent argument. You're one of the blokes the Bird talks about, who want a snug job on leaving school and everything ordered for them."

"Shut up, Willie," cried Jack in mortification. "You are funny. I've never known you to be like this before."

"You can't argue. You don't face facts."

"Damn fool, you! I don't want to argue. Are we building a hut or not?"

"That's right, beg the question. I tell you——"

Jack threw down the chopper.

"I'm going home," he announced. "I'm tired of it, Willie, you are getting just like our fathers! That is how they go on!"

For the first time in his life Willie saw himself through the eyes of another. In a brief moment, less than a second, he seemed to stand away from his own body and to see himself as a boy. His face fell, and he turned away.

Jack ran after him and held him tightly. He struggled, but Jack had twice his strength. Suddenly he was limp, and sinking to the ground, covered his head with his hands and wept.

"Oh, Willie, don't be hurt," begged Jack, putting his arm round his shoulder. "I'm sorry, Willie, really I am. I didn't mean to be nasty."

"I'm nasty," replied Willie, wiping his eyes with his hands. "I'm stupid to-day. I don't know what's the matter. No wonder no one cares a bit if I live or die. I may as well be dead," and his lip quivered.

"Every one cares if you live," said Jack, "you know I do, and all the chaps at school like you, only you think they're laughing at you, and my parents and Peggy and Doris and all the others do. Piggy likes you, and what's more, he told me you couldn't half fight."

"Well, I can't."

"Can't you? That's nonsense."

"Anyway, I can't climb."

"How about the Rookery? Bony funk'd it, and Clemow and Hoys, don't forget."

"I'm no good at football."

"You're all right."

"I know nothing about anything."

"Willie, you're getting really silly now. Who knows as much about birds as you do in the school?"

"Jack, I'm sorry I was nasty. I will try and mend my ways."

"That's all right, Willie. I'm always your friend, you know. I'd die for you."

"I'd die for you, too."

"Hurray for old Willie."

They shook hands, and jumped up, singing, to commence with the hut.

After two hours' labour their faces were red and their hair hung over foreheads like damp waterweed hanging to stones upon the shore. A blister was on Willie's palm, for the meat-saw would not cut.

"I say, it's an awful fag making a hut."

"Isn't it!"

"I'm hungry."

"So am I."

"We mustn't be late for dinner."

A dove was cooing in a hawthorn at the edge of the island. The sunlight beat through the trees and formed a shadow maze that slipped and shuffled as the gentle wind came across the water. They sat on the ground, breathing hard with the exertion of their labour. Monotonously and in vague pulsations the whirring of the reaper-and-binders moving round the big wheatfield died to nothingness as a stronger breeze set the shadows dancing. It was cool under the green leaves; the boys rested in tranquillity, forming no conscious thought. The busy harvesting of prospecting bees as with sun-crisped vanes they sought the wild flowers rasped in an undercurrent of sound like the deep vibration of a slackened harp-string. Summer was in its highest glory—the golden wheat was being gathered—soon the year

would topple into the time of decay or quietude for all things which had laboured in the light of summer. A cabbage butterfly that all the morning had been flickering like an unmelted snowflake over the water passed under the arches of the trees and rested upon a purple flower of knapweed. Dreamily Willie watched it. After a while it opened its wings and drifted away, up and down in aimless, happy flight ; to be entangled in a web and immediately seized by a honey-coloured spider. A squeezed feeling came around the boy's heart, and a pain behind his eyes as he thought of death in the sunshine ; of the pike in the lake pursuing the roach and other fish ; of the sparrowhawk that might kill the dove cooing so softly and sweetly in the hawthorn. Yet he knew that he was foolish to think of such things, because Biddy and every one said that God was up in the sky guarding all the things that He had created. Everything was ordained, and everything happened for the best, so Biddy told him. He must not think about it ; he was wicked, and might get struck down by lightning at any moment. The butterfly still had the spider hanging to it, and its dusty wings were moving feebly. He sprang up, and smashed the web to the ground, crushing all beneath his foot.

"I *hate* spiders," said Jack, "and was just going to kill the thing myself. Funny we think the same, isn't it?"

"I was thinking that it was so beastly cruel."

"So was I."

"What's it all for?"

"But the cabbage butterfly lays its eggs on the cabbage, don't forget, Willie!"

"Yes, I suppose it's no good thinking of it," he replied slowly.

Jack said :

"I wonder how many chaps of our age would discuss the things we do. Not many, I bet."

"But we're quite different, you know, Jack. I was talking about Death to Father the other day, and do you think he has thought about the problem? No! You'd hardly believe it, would you? He actually said that I was trying to teach my grandmother to suck eggs."

"I know, Willie. It's the same with me. My father is pretty ignorant. As though you and me didn't know all about babies and all that!"

"There isn't much we don't know, quietly!"

"You're right, old Willie!"

They spoke in this manner for several minutes, gradually becoming incoherent. After a languid pause, Willie asked:

"How about the time, Jack?"

"Yes, the sun is high. There's duck for dinner, and we mustn't be late, or those pigs of sisters will have eaten it all."

A moorhen was paddling near the catamaran, white-and-black tail jerking and flipping, and on seeing the boys it flew in clumsy flight and with legs trailing in the water to the shelter of the reeds. Ripples splashed burning sunlight from the heated surface of the longpond, and the sky was deeply enamelled in blue.

Jack sat on the hind seat and Willie shoved off. Rhythmically the flaxen-haired boy dipped and pushed with the bladed paddles, and the boat shot through the water.

"Look at the carp," said Willie, pointing among the waterlilies about a hundred yards away, where three great brown dorsal fins among the cool greeneries showed the basking monsters.

"We've never caught one of those yet," complained Jack.

"They're so cunning."

The boathouse was as they had left it, except that the spider, which had been spreadeagled upon the damp tiles of the floor, was gone. It had been discovered by a crackey and eagerly swallowed. The same wren was at that moment on the roof and singing joyfully and with a volume of sound that seemed preposterously enormous for such a minute moth of a bird.

THE INTRUDER

WHEN Jack had looked through his telescope and announced the dread news that Mr. Rore was walking round the lake, that ancient instrument had not deceived him in spite of

the fact that all the lenses were missing and that it was therefore but a hollow and tapered tube of brass. The Head Master had seen that two boys were apparently fishing in the lake from a boat, but had not looked further. He was too preoccupied in other matters.

Mr. Rore made it a duty to walk at least eight miles every day during the vacation. Sometimes he took his little son with him, a wilful child of seven years of age who the term before had commenced work in 2c form with the immediate nickname of The Egg (Effish had been responsible for this apposite nomination of an unhatched fledgling of the Old Bird). That morning at eight o'clock he had wanted to take his son with him, but The Egg was wishful of playing in a cricket match with a few friends who habitually used an elm tree in the garden for a wicket. In a thin whine he said that he wanted to play with them. Mr. Rore decided, therefore, to walk alone as his son was perhaps too young at present to appreciate the pleasures of mental wrestling. Telling his wife that he would be back at twenty-seven minutes past one o'clock for luncheon, he slipped into a pocket Hildern's *Problems of Differential Calculus*, the *Symposium* and the *Phædrus* of Plato, *A Treatise on Sanscrit*, and left the house.

He had not gone far before he encountered two boys playing football with a pebble in the dusty roadway. They did not see him, but continued to butt one another with lowered shoulders. One of them wore a black cap, in the front of which was affixed a silver badge shaped like a shield and stamped in relief with the arms of Colham Grammar School; the other wore nothing on his head save a bunch of hair that in an alleged civilisation responsible for the invention of hats was of an unnecessary length. Mr. Rore as he approached stared at them keenly; the one who had no cap saw him and immediately sat down in the dusty roadway. His companion did not see him, and being unable to account for this sudden surrender, he benefited by it to the extent of kneeling on the stomach of his adversary. So excited was the stretched-out boy to communicate his awful news that he appeared to the kneeling one to be suddenly mad. Accordingly his friend redoubled his endeavour.

"Cave—cay—cay-vee!" gasped the other. "Cay-vee, man!"

His adversary commenced to massage his ribs. Effish's eyes seemed to bulge from his head like bottle-stoppers, but Beckelt continued with his enjoyment.

"The—Bird," grunted Effish.

Beckelt paused and looked round. Mr. Rore was four yards away. Beckelt leapt to his feet, pulled his cap from his head displaying equally long hair as he did so; his jaw fell and he looked at the ground, then at Mr. Rore, rapidly and many times. Effish continued to lie on his back like an expiring frog. He groaned slightly. Mr. Rore remembered that it was holiday time; and that his pupilage was composed of many different classes of boys. Quietly he spoke:—

"Good morning, ah, Beckelt. Your hair is very long. Get it cut by a barber sometime wi' you?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Effish, I perceive that you are groaning. You are not e, I hope? Beckelt was perhaps a little rough? The instinct for individual domination is still manifest in us. Evolution is tardy. We must not depend upon evolution solely. Otherwise we follow the mastodon and the brontosaurus to extinction.

Effish rose to his feet. He leaned to one side and spoke in gasps, looking round instinctively for an audience before he did so.

"No, Sir, we were only playing."

"Ah, yes. I would recommend you also to go to a barber and get your locks shorn. Unlike Samson, you would be in no danger of losing energy. But really, boys, you should not play about in the roadway like this. Remember that you are pupils at Colham School. I trust that you are enjoying your vacation?"

"Yes, Sir, thank you."

"Remember that nothing but play is injurious. Your minds are in that plastic state. Mental paar is not to be sought for its advantages in making money. Money is a false god. An entirely erroneous vaa'ue is placed upon money

by a short-sighted civilisation. A life ennobled by loftiness of thought should be the desire of every boy. Do you agree ? ”

“ Yes, Sir.”

Gravely the Head inclined his head, then went on :

“ Make the most of your boyhood. Life is ever fleeting. Happiness haps ! And remember—*What should be, shall be*. There are sharks and tigers in the world, boys, as you will find. The pathway to righteousness is beset with difficulties. *Ad astra per aspera !* Consider that alembroth. But time passes on swift wings. My programme is mapped out. I must away. Good morning, good morning.”

“ Good morning, Sir,” they replied.

Swiftly he went down the road, breathing in deep draughts the air not yet charged with the heat of a brazen harvest sun, and feeling his blood respond to the exaltation of the morning. An hour passed, and on he walked, his body feeling taut as a strung bow and his head clear as the æther above. He told himself that he was fifty-six years of age, but a reasoned and ordered life after twenty-two, when the last mild foolishnesses of youth were passed, had kept him in bodily perfection and permitted mental power of extraordinary greatness.

After walking all round the lake he sat on a thrown beech tree and took the volume of Plato from his pocket. Certain marked passages of this he read. So effectual was his concentration that all sounds around him disappeared. He was communing with the philosopher and Socrates his friend ; listening to their talk, as calmly and with measured words they expounded their doctrines and their great thoughts, while the sunlight beat on the temples and the doves fluttered about the marble columns. From afar came the murmur as within a phantom shell of a cerulean sea lapping the Phelerum Bay ; young and ardent men with fearless eyes and noble brows were listening to the discourse upon the Martian Hill, learning that life was beautiful if controlled by the soul, that virtue was knowledge. Then the condemnation and death of Socrates—bludgeoned by the un-understanding of the masses that he desired so fervently

to help ; the flight of Plato, and his escape from slavery in Syracuse.

Mr. Rore read on, sitting on the thrown tree in ambient sunshine and shadows gently blown. A little bird came to the log, calling *sip-sip-sip* in a sweet whisper to its mate, taking no heed of the still figure. Reading the *Phædrus* he was strengthened once more in his belief that it was more important to teach than to write. He thought of the *Symposium*, and Plato's interpretation of the love men were gradually led to contemplate in its highest form, in which it appeared as an exalted and spiritual yearning for a super-sensible beauty that could be found only in an ideal world. More and more the Ideas began to shape themselves. He thought of the centuries that had gone, of the centuries of labour and toil all passed into nothingness ; the earth so beautiful, its dream enabling an immortality of thought—and still the misery of the masses was unchanged. More than two thousand years since Plato died, and the thoughts still not acted upon ; Greatheart after Greatheart misunderstood and bludgeoned. Hemlock, the cross, the stake—ah ! The cultivation of a mentality to enable all to perceive the wisdom of the Teachers, to understand the outpourings of the genius of Christ—the genius that was an absolute balance of mind and sane clarity of vision—and of all those lesser Others, was the highest ideal of Man !

Softly the wind rustled the veined leaves of the beeches above : wild pigeons flew from their hidden loftiness to drink in the shallows by the lake : from afar came the faint singing of happy boyish voices and the whirring of reaper-and-binders. Slowly the gold-blurred shadows slipped over the ground, obeying the sun burning in unfathomed heaven as when Plato dreamed and wrote. The summer morning went on, the sound of knocking way over the lake stopped, and the reaping ceased. There was a long silence ; then he looked at his watch—there were remaining two minutes before he need commence the return. It took him, he had found, ninety-seven minutes to walk back from the lake. He mapped out all his day, and rarely varied his programme.

Drawing a deep breath, and glancing upwards, he noticed

the beauty of the sky above. Conscious thought ceased ; he was absorbed by the glory of the universe. Utter conviction of the righteousness of his life's work came to him, an exaltation entered his soul. The burring lines of sound drawn irregularly by the bees died away, colour faded, he felt as strong as the earth, he was no longer a man—the soul was everything, the body puny, now was eternity. . . .

Jack and Willie saw him as they walked rapidly along the path, remembering that there was duck for dinner. They stopped and whispered together, but decided that it was neither necessary to turn back nor to hide the tools, as Mr. Rore could not possibly know that Colonel Tetley had not given them permission to cut down trees upon the island in the longpond.

"I've got my Cæsar in my pocket," said Willie. "Let me come on the other side so as to make it conspicuous."

"Let's risk going past. He looks asleep, doesn't he? Ah, he's moved. Walk on, man, he's seen us. Talk about something quick—er, you're quite wrong, Maddison!" Willie took the hint.

"I'm perfectly sure I'm right, Temperley. What you say is absurd."

"No, no, Maddison. You are incorrect. Excuse me interrupting, but——" He paused hopelessly. Almost feverishly Willie went on:—

"Quite wrong, Temperley. Now, according to Cæsar——"

Mr. Rore's eyes twinkled. His hearing was acute. The boys removed their hats, Willie dropping the meat-saw as he did so.

"Good morning, good morning," said Mr. Rore.

"Good morning, Sir," they replied, with an assumption of cordiality as though to infer delight at the meeting. Willie stooped to pick up the saw and *de Bello Gallico* shot from his pocket.

"Ah, you are studying your Cæsar, I see, Maddison! I congratulate you. Now tell me the classical point each of you contests so fiercely, and let me decide."

They looked at one another. Neither had the power to

invent anything. Their minds felt empty. At length Willie stammered :

" We were planning a battle, Sir."

" Ah, that is interesting ! Very. I trust the generalship of Cæsar will be of service to you. Are you destined for Sandhurst, Maddison ? "

" Yes, Sir."

" Ah, yes. There is much time. Meanwhile plenty of play ! Tincture it with just a little mental exercise ! You both look very well. The country is beautiful, is it not ? Well, I must return homewards. Give my compliments to your fathers, wi' you ? Good morning, good morning ! "

" I say, *are* you for the Army, man ? " whispered Jack, when they were a fair distance away.

" I don't know. I'll tell him I meant the Ichiargo Army, if he asks."

" Good lord, what a nerve. But it's too serious for joking. Whatever made you say it ? "

" I don't know."

" You'll cop it if he finds out."

" I don't care. Another fortnight before we go back. Don't turn round, you fool. Shall we go in the field this afternoon ? Might get a rabbit with a stick ! "

Two minutes later they were shouting for joy of an unrestricted life and the summer sunshine in the country. Mr. Rore was forgotten, but the roast duck was not, so they ran back to Skirr Farm.

HARVEST

MR. TEMPERLEY did not linger over his dinner. The summit of the year was reached with the reaping of the wheat in the great field, and he was restless to get back to his work. Willie and Jack ate so quickly and heartily that a feeling of surfeit overcame them before the pudding was brought on the table. But it happened to be merely rice pudding, and unrelieved by jam, so they asked to be allowed to leave the table. Jack's sisters, who in the opinion of their brother

and his friend were of less importance than the most crumbled oddmedodd (much less so indeed, since wrens' nests had been found in the pockets of those figures of solitude) begged to be allowed to go with the boys, but their mother restrained them, saying that they must wash their faces and brush their hair before going out to Mrs. Norman's; and amid complaints of "It isn't fair," the two boys left the farm.

They kept behind Mr. Temperley for no reason except that as a parent he was to be treated warily. The sun flamed in heaven, and the glare of the white loose dust of the roadway hurt their eyes. Romance had gone from the countryside, Willie thought; romance that begins to grow when the first hazel catkins loosen in the bushes and hang downwards like fairy arrows fallen from the sky, scattering their pollen on the scarlet flower-specks whence shall come the autumn nuts. Then the light is soft and gentle, for the sun is the great lover of all the wild things, and tender to his virgin brides; the thin stalks of wheat that have broken through the earth absorb the sunbeams and cover its dullness with a greenish mist. Among the elms appears a brown haze as the February blossoms come to sudden maturity and fade as quickly; in the woodlands the bluebell shoots pierce the layer of dead leaves and rise higher to their ideal. In March the wheat is vigorous and beautiful, and the lapwings sough and twirl above voicing the poetry of their wild life under heaven. Every day brings something anew to the countryside. The willowbirds and chiffchaffs flit across the sea to the ash wood of their ancestors. Comes then the cuckoo, profligate and loud of voice, a freeloader who cares not what may happen to his young. The days go on, and at night under the moon the nightingale pours forth his genius, hushed is the forest; the wanderer in the woodland may leave the flax of dream when the bird's ecstasy rises like the singing voice of a poet lost for ever among the trees. The lovely month of May yields its coloured blossoms and fragrant petals in the hayfields, and the year is exquisite. All day and all night sings the nightingale; the million brides of the flowers and the bees and the birds are feeling the first stir of new life that is the gift of love and beauty. In the watermeadow the golden

goblets of the buttercups are deeply burnished and overbrimming with richest sun-wine, and as the twittering swallows glide low over the wrought cups the light reflects upon their breasts rounded so lovingly. But beauty goes, and in June the virgin loveliness is fading, although a fleeting glamour is recaptured for awhile when the wild roses foam the hedges. Into the July air living things are sped from cocoon and shell ; the insect hum begins to be heard over the wheat. The stalks lose their sappiness, and the overspilling fountain of birdsong no longer falls in melodious purlings down the sunshine. Sultrily the poppies scowl among the swaying flags, inviting the love of their lord the sun while the drowsy insects sleep among their languid blooms.

With July romance is over ; all things are busy with their offsprung life. Into the hardening stalks of the corn the partridge leads her chicks, while the sparrowhawk glides down the hedgerow in search of finch or blackbird. The wind comes from over the heated fields, and changes the hue of the corn as it wanders, drawing forth vast sighs as though of regret for beauty changed into life. The white corn feverfew and the purple thistle plume overtop the grain as July passes, but the rose petals have long fallen into dust. Brazen August clangs in, and the corn is ripening ; soon the red arms of the reaper-and-binder whirl among the baked stems. The last cuckoos go, the swifts prepare to leave their nests of cobweb and mote in the thatch of the cottages : and no song comes from the woodland, save perhaps from a redbreast in whose heart there is always hope. . . .

Willie felt the shade of a sadness as he walked along the hot roadway—the hawthorn leaves were dusty and the nests deserted. The holidays were nearly over, and soon faded summer would be drifting into the abandon of autumn. With the melancholy that is sometimes acute in adolescence he thought of those other springtimes and summers, each with their happy memories, and all ended now for evermore. He was growing up, and he wanted to remain a boy all his life. His eyes brimmed. A swallow passed over his head, gliding in effortless flight before him, like a dull jewel stolen

from the summer sky. The boy yearned towards it, and in fancy followed it till it disappeared over the hedge ; soon the swallows would be gathering round the rushes by the lake, eager for the long, long journey to the sun and the south. He, Willie, would be left behind ; he loved them all, with a heart full of happiness that was almost a pain as he fingered, so very gently, the fragile speckled eggs in their muddled cups under the cattlesheds, and later stroked the little swallows as they crouched timorously in his hand. He loved them all, but they cared nothing for him. Then there were the tragedies, the savageries of nature ; such pain and death in the sunshine—however much his heart yearned towards them, it made no difference.

"What's the matter, Willie," said Jack, looking at him.

"Nothing."

"Your eyes are wet, you know, man," continued his friend, alarmed lest he might be ill. He thought of his friend's happiness, as usual, and did not consider himself. He persisted in asking questions.

"Oh, rot," scoffed Willie.

"Do you feel sick ? You ate a lot of duck, you know."

"Oh, shut up !"

"All right, keep your temper. After all, I was only asking. Listen, did you hear that ? That was a twelve-bore going off ! Probably Big Will'um's gun."

"Come on !"

But it was a hot day. Mr. Temperley turned round, saw that they were following, and waited for them. Willie noticed how his face was tanned by the sun, and his eyes a very light blue, like those of Jack.

"Hot work, running !" he remarked, and was silent till they reached the gateway.

In a corner of the field sat two groups of people. Nearly every one in the village who could walk came to the big wheatfield to watch the beginning of the first day's reaping. An ancient superstition (dating far back into the history of mankind, long before the rude carvings in the hill-caves of India) held that the first fruits of the harvest contained the corn-spirit ; in some parts of England it lingers even now.

Ever since Skirr Farm was built in the fifteenth century by John Temperley, an old reformed wrecker—that is to say, he became honest and retired inland from his sea-haunt of the Corpsnout when he had stored a sufficiency of money—the first sheaves had been cut four days before the reaping began. The berries from the first shock were knocked out with flails upon the hard floor of the threshing barn, ground by Andrew the miller, and made into loaves for the harvest feast; every one tasted of these special loaves and so swallowed the corn-spirit. Back through the ages it was believed that the eating of the corn-spirit ensured fruitfulness for the coming year; and for the reapers fruitfulness meant health to work at the harvest; scanty gold indeed for both labourer and farmer. Time had seen the decay of the custom, but it still remained at Skirr Farm, but nowhere else in the neighbourhood. Likewise all the water-mills had fallen into disuse save that worked by Andrew Fowler, the miller in whose pond Big Will'um had one evening shot an otter.

The horses harnessed to the machines had finished their oats-and-chaff, and were tossing empty nosebags into the air and breathing shudderingly into them. Sometimes one stamped ponderously, as when a gadfly found its flank. Near the horses was a gathering of old men, who had drawn away from the others because they preferred to eat their food naturally; and the younger men did not like their manners. Big Will'um the Bailiff was standing by them and drinking huge gulps of small ale (the Goliath XXX Ale was never given to the mowers or reapers) from a brass-bound firkin, or wooden "bottle." On seeing his master he lowered it and touched his hat and said, "Aiy, aiy, Varmer." They had been friends since boyhood, and often crowstarvers together in the spinney. The old men smoked their pipes, and spat.

The other party was made up of about a dozen men, women, and boys who had come to look on; among them a mason named George Davidson. He had a prematurely wizened face, and was usually in an intoxicated condition on Saturday nights, when he would sing in a stentorian voice

the one song that he knew, *Why I married the Miller's Widow*. Near him sat Tom Sorrell, the young quarryman, with his gun ; Dolly, and Bill Nye the cornkipper. They were formed circlewise, with Dolly and Bill Nye in the centre. Now and again the young men burst into a guffaw at something that the women said—they were cheeking them. The brooding, aloof Dolly was gone for the time being ; remained a pretty young woman who was desired by the mason, the kiln-tender, and the preacher for a wife.

John Fry stood up near the circle. He would not rest with common labourers ; besides being a preacher to old men and women, and in cold weather, to courting couples (who with vacant but contented minds sat at the back and held hands) he considered that his trade of horse-dealer entitled him to respect and dignity. Therefore he stood, having just come into the field ; jealous of the kiln-tender with a dull bitterness in his heart. He had wanted Dolly for many years. Once when she was seventeen he tried to kiss her. She smacked his face ; and he had desired her all the more. Later on she had agreed to walk with him, and he had believed that at last she recognised his proper worth—he thought sometimes, especially after a bout of secret carnality, that he was one of the biblical prophets re-created. He did not drink in Rookhurst, but about four times a year he went into the low quarter of Colham and there tried to forget his obsession for Dolly ; to return more earnestly to his preaching in the tin chapel.

George Davidson loved her as well, and weepingly had told her so on one occasion ; he had been full of old ale. Dolly was sorry for him, and had not laughed at his maundering ; and George Davidson had continued to weep. Dolly had spoken kindly to him and he commenced to work overtime and had sworn off beer, but the following Saturday night he went into the Cat and Gnatfly and emerged when the moon was high singing lugubriously *Why I married the Miller's Widow*.

Tom Sorrell lived alone in a tin-roofed cottage in the quarry. The cottage was cold in winter and hot in summer, but thatch was impossible owing to the danger of fire when

the great kilns were pouring out their flames. He was a big man, and thirty years of age; habitually he went into the taverns for company, but rarely drank to excess. He looked like a miller as his clothes were always covered with fine lime-dust, which made his large eyes of a more pronounced blue. Dolly liked him, and sometimes went into the quarry to have a chat with him; his eyes reminded her of Jim.

Bill Nye sat crosslegged beside Dolly, for whom he had a regard because she gave him food whenever he came to the cottage in the pinewood. He grinned at Willie, and scratched his head as something irritated his scalp with greater insistence than usual.

Willie beckoned, and he jumped up, ran swiftly between John Fry and another man, and came to him.

"Lend me your gun, will you, Bill Nye?" asked Willie. Jack looked eagerly at him.

"Bailiff lent un," grinned the diminutive ragamuffin.

"Well, you can get over that, surely! Look here, it isn't needed this afternoon. I'll give you a penny all for yourself, too, and a tart if you call to-night."

"Noomye! Bailiff wull awhip ee!"

"Rot, of course he won't. Be a sport, Bill Nye. We're friends, you know."

"Dursn't do it, maester."

"Not for twopence?"

Bill Nye showed his teeth and shook his head like a dog.

"Sixpence, and that's all you'll get!"

"Be ee?"

Jack caught his arm. The others were looking at them.

"Come behind the hedge," he frowned.

"Now look here Bill Nye, you've got to lend us the gun and the powder horn and shot, see? And what's more, you're a greedy little devil who hasn't any decency, so you will get nothing. And if you split I lick you, see?"

"Ess, Mas' Jack, Bill woin't atell."

"Right! Give us the horn."

The cornkipper pulled the old-fashioned powder flask from his pocket.

"When they start again you'll pass the gun through the hedge, see? And you'll tell no one."

"Ess, Mas' Jack."

"Right; now hop off."

Jack kicked him, and Bill Nye slipped through the gap in the hedge.

"That's the way to treat them, Willie! He's a damned grawbey, and nothing more. Anyhow, we've got the gun; that's the thing!"

"We shall have to sneak up this lane pretty quickly, or your guv'nor will see us!"

"Trust us!"

They went through the hedge gap and came to the others. The men stared at them, some touched forelocks. Bill Nye sat next to Dolly and grinned. Three of his front teeth were badly decayed. With dark and loving eyes she looked at Willie.

"Mas' Lewis be coming up to look on," she told him.

"Paason wull be cumin too, shouldn't wonder," added George Davidson.

"Ay, that ee may," they chorused.

"Ould Gramma Nye be cumin?" asked George Davidson.

"Ay, if she bean't broke in two," replied Dolly.

They cackled with laughter, and George Davidson wiped his beer-stained moustache with the back of his hand. He felt rather nervous of being one of the principal speakers, but was in a reckless mood.

"Then 'er'll be buried in a couple o boxes!" he remarked.

An instant shout of laughter from wide and open mouths, "Aiy, aiy!" they chuckled.

"Paason wull ave rare jaab to bury ee then!"

The wizened mason felt flattered by the guffaws that followed his four jokes.

"Reckon Jim Ollomun may cum back?" said one of the women.

There was immediate silence. Heads moved quickly as they looked at one another. Dolly was holding in her lap an old straw sun-hat, around which that morning she had woven a garland of poppies and corn-marigolds; and when

the name of her absent lover was mentioned she went pale and looked at the flowers before her, which were drooping and beginning to wither. With work-roughened fingers she pulled apart the petals of a poppy.

"What's that got tew do with you, Lou Boon?" she said, looking up suddenly.

"Ah were only asking. Time Jim Ollomun cum back tew ee, bant it?"

One of the goistering women named Chowles must needs say something about it. She was a woman of about sixty and had two slatternly daughters and a sawny son who could not get married. "Er promised to cum back and wed ee praaper, didn't er," she taunted.

By "er" she meant Jim. Many of the older village people referred to a worn-out horse or dog as though it were female; anything considered weakly, and therefore to be despised and held in contempt, was, in conversation, referred to as "her." The taunt was therefore double-barbed.

"Closen ees jaw, ould ooman," growled Tom Sorrell. They started to quarrel. Dolly smacked the face of the woman Chowles, who, screeching obscene words, clitched with her right hand, broken-nailed and lumpy and irregular with rheumatic swelling, at the younger woman's hair. The quarryman interfered, and she spat at him; John Fry came up to the struggling pair and thrust himself in Tom's way. He was a friend of Mrs. Chowles.

Willie, Jack, and Bill Nye danced round them. A packet of cigarettes fell from the quarryman's pocket, which in a moment the cornkipper seized and thrust into his pocket.

"They'll fight!" shouted Jack.

"Carrambo!" answered Willie.

The big kiln-tender caught hold of the preacher's shoulder, and flung him to the ground. John Fry was up in a moment, and rushing ragefully at the other. In a moment they were fighting, their breath coming in gasps, the blows heavy and smashing. The women watched, and Dolly felt a strange pleasure that both men were fighting about her.

Mr. Temperley, his bailiff, and the others came up. A fight was always a great sight. Big Will'um, although over

forty, was the strongest man in the village, as well as the most gentle. He went between the two, and flung them apart. John Fry swore, and with blood streaming from a cut eye lowered his head and rushed at him. Big Will'um hit him on the jaw, not as hard as he might have done, but it finished the sandy-haired Fry. The bailiff turned to hit the other, but dropped his hands on finding that Tom Sorrell had no desire to continue. The quarryman had a swollen lip and a cut upon one cheek. Both he and Fry were powerful men. Dolly went to Tom and touched his cheek. The women leered at one another.

"I be ar-right, Dolly," he said, panting.

MATERNITY

JOHN FRY got up and walked away, never once looking back. He regretted savagely that he had interfered on behalf of one who knew not God's word; silently he cursed Dolly as a woman of Babylon. He hated her fiercely, because she had been the cause of his humiliation. So he went home, there to vent upon a little old and shrunken woman who cooked for him and cleaned his house the vicious feelings within himself. A flush came to the old woman's cheek as he cursed her, and her eyes that with the years had shrunken into their sockets grew shiny with her heart-beats. But she continued to mend the sock she was darning; the house was clean and fresh, for all the love in her heart went in work to make John Fry happy. She adored him, and forgave him everything he said and did, and believed in him with a passionate faith that nothing disturbed; and nightly she prayed to her dear Lord that He might spare her many years to work for him; for she was John Fry's mother.

FORMATION OF THE OWL CLUB

No more the bronzed grain bowed and returned to the wind when time had tallied all the thirty-one glaring days allotted

to August; came September, when the guns went among the shocks and dull reports echoed from the wooded slopes. Willie bemoaned the passing of the days, for school loomed very near. One morning they met Bony, who had pedalled on a squeaking and rusty bicycle from Colham, where he lived. He was proud of two new things that he had—spectacles framed in gold upon his gaunt nose, and a young owl in his pocket. The boys went into a cattle shippen near by and in the dimness of the tallat, or loft, Bony pulled it from his pocket, kicking with feathered legs and snapping beak with displeasure. However, it appeared to know him, as it sat upon his shoulder and stared at them with dark and solemn eyes. Its master made a weird noise with his lips, explaining that he was talking to it, and a shrill chirping came from the owlet's beak. It was asking for food.

"Here you are, Clarence," crooned the boy, "here's his little mousie, then." He took a dead mouse from his other pocket, and held it up before Clarence, who gulped it into his crop.

"I say, what a swallow," exclaimed Jack admiringly.

"Let's form an Owl Club," suggested Willie. "Just us three, and perhaps Rupert Bryers."

"My pal's got diphtheria," announced Bony with pride, "so, feeling lonely with only Clarence for company, I thought I'd look you chaps up. He won't come to school on the fourteenth, of course!"

"Lucky devil!" they sighed.

"He's had a hole cut in his neck. He nearly did a sky-flit."

"Carrambo! Fancy old Bryers dead—awful, isn't it?"

"Still, he'll get another month at home."

Again they sighed with envy.

"About the Owl Club," said Willie, stroking the soft head of Clarence and finding that although it looked enormous, in reality the owl had a small body, "let's have one. I vote that Jack and me, you and Rupert be in it. All of us are nature lovers. And in after life, when I'm known as the Birdman of Britain, and you, Bony, as the—the—the—oh, I fail to guess your secret."

"I shall be the authority on stuffing animals and dissecting bodies at the British Museum."

"Is that your ambition? Good lord! Well, I suppose it isn't so bad. Anyway, when you're that, and Jack here is the most famous angler, having caught an eighty-pun' pike after two hours' fight in one of those great sullen lakes in Ireland"—(Jack whistled softly at the romance of it)—"and Rupert is the Poet Lorry—you—know! Well, when all that's done, and we're famous, then we'll meet in this very spot once a year and have a picnic!"

"Rather," yelled Bony, "and I shall have a house full of owls and hawks and jays."

"We'll train an army of them to tear Ratpoison and the Bird to pieces!"

"And Taffy!"

"And that sarcastic Waugh."

"Not Old Scratch, though!"

"No fear, he's a ripper. So's old Bunny."

"By the way, you haven't done any holiday task, have you?"

"You've guessed my secret."

"Nor have we. Let 'em all come, we don't care for the whack!"

Soon their enthusiasm waned, and Clarence, with protesting snaps and silent flaps of tawny wings (not long sprouted from bluey-gray quills) was urged into Bony's pocket, and that six-foot youth, his face tanned by the sun, shook their hands and heaved away on his fixed-wheel bicycle, turning round many times to wave to them before a corner hid him; and long after a view of him was possible, they heard the shrill squeaking of his machine—or as Willie suggested, it might have been Bony and Clarence singing to each other.

Only too quickly passed the days, for time that goes without conscious effort of thought is happiness.

Elsie went away with her parents to Belgium and the convent-school on the twelfth, and as they left The Firs in the battered station cab surrounded by boxes and trunks, Willie could not speak. The apple in his throat rose and

remained there. It was not love, he explained to Jack afterwards, but suddenly as he stood there the lump came.

"I can't explain, man, but I seemed to realise how awfully old I'm getting. Isn't it awful to think of? And yet I can't ever imagine myself a man, although it must be ripping to have to shave every day. Elsie's growing quite big, and yet as I stood there and shook hands like a milksop it seemed but yesterday that I used to wear those awful breeches, you know, the ones Bill Nye wears on Sundays. And then I remembered Jim, and how he saved you after your tremendous climb for the carrion crow's nest in old Tetley's garden. And fancy, next Speech Day I shall be among the basses in the choir!"

But Jack, although he listened, did not seem to feel the change to be so marvellous or yet of sufficient import to warrant such a curious state of mind in his friend.

The sickening morning arrived. Willie, in reply to his father's queries at breakfast, assured him that he had had a fine vacation. Mr. Maddison asked him if he had done his holiday task, and Willie replied that he had; and was promptly and very naturally disbelieved.

"I don't know why you want to deceive me so consistently, I'm hanged if I do. Still, you have never wanted to confide in me. I've been a boy, you know, Willie, and when I was a boy I did much the same sort of things that you did, only I don't remember that I told unnecessary lies."

Willie felt uncomfortable and longed for the meal to end. He packed his satchel, fingering distastefully the ruler and pens with other badges of servitude, dusted his cap, and prepared to leave the house.

"Well, I shall see you to-night, I expect. Don't be late. And by the way, here is something for you. There's Jack coming, looking like a wet week. What a big boy he is! Good-bye," and Mr. Maddison, after placing something in his son's hand and waving loosely to Jack, shuffled into the hall again in his slippers. Willie saw that his father had given him half a crown.

"Good lord," he said to Jack as they went out of the gate, "whoever would have thought it? He's a rum devil,

I'm dashed if I understand him. Curses me one moment for stuffing him up and then tips me."

They bought two packets of Weights at the tobacconist's with twopence of the money, and determined to purchase catapult elastic and gunpowder with the remainder; and half a pound of broken biscuits every day till the small change was exhausted.

The Cerr-Nores were waiting at the Halt for the creaking conveyance drawn by a scrofulous engine that the railway company considered good enough for schoolboys and the wretched people living in the outlying villages who were forced to travel to Colham so early in the morning. With unconscious irony it was called the "moter" and worked by an ancient man with a peaked cap and a long white beard who had endured stoically throughout the years the taunts of schoolboys and their inevitable sarcasms about his personal appearance and the welfare of his "moter." Since the installation of the locomotive, schoolboy disrespect at various times had inquired:—

"When's she going to have a baby, Daddy?" apparently sure of the sex of the railway company's engine.

"Ma-aa-aa, old Nanny Goat, where's your licence for a performin' flea?"

"Mind she don't bust herself with coughin', Grandad!"

"Poor old lady, give her a drop o' gin and she'll fall over"; or

"Turn Lazy Lizzie into the fields and she'll sprout horns."

All of which he allowed to pass with an expressionless face, as he saw no humour in their remarks, and "b'ys would be b'ys, dang um!"

They left the sizzling "moter" at Colham Station and joined the returning boys along High Street and up the hill to the school. Every one agreed that it was rotten to be back again; every one had had a spiffing time, not half; every one declared that his report had been bad, thank goodness, and that he had escaped the calumny of recorded good conduct.

The porter stood by the main gate to welcome them,

wearing his black and red uniform and a cockaded top-hat. With a potato skilfully thrown Bony managed to knock this from his head when the porter was not looking ; and Effish, lingering near, managed to be reported to Mr. Rore for the offence. He got a dozen witnesses to prove his innocence, but did not produce them till the last moment. Throughout gloomy prayers he stood on the platform, while Mr. Croodbrane, tanned of face after the annual muration at Ilfracombe, thumped out the melody of Dr. Bullnote's Latin Hymn and *The War March of the Priests*.

The only person who seemed cheered at the reopening of school was Cotham Charlie ; he had lost one ear during the holidays in a clawing argument with a niggling neighbour—whose dustbin he had been raking. This neighbour, a distempered thomas-cat, was found lying dead inside the school piano one morning in the third week of September, but how it came there no one ever knew.

BACK AGAIN

WILLIE was soon adapted to the place where they attempted to mould the fluid character of boyhood ; and as a result he lied and showed much hypocritical cunning. In the woods with Jack, or Bill Nye, he was eager and natural, noting many things as he walked in front of his companion : a nest that was visible now that autumn had decreed that the leaves must drift to earth : the cast feather of a finch : a late flower that dwelt quietly under a hedgerow. But in school he was different. He could not, or would not, learn, he was known as a slacker, he became cunning and deceitful. Fitzacher, certainly, was as eager to learn from books as Willie was to escape from them ; Willie despised Fitzacher because he could not tell the difference between a hoody crow and a carrion crow. Once Bony told Willie that Fitzacher had been reported to have said that he himself was a shining example, and that Willie would be a bad companion later on in life, so Willie immediately challenged him to a fight. Fitzacher protested with much sincerity

that he had never said such a thing, and then Bony told him, amid guffaws, that it was Golding major who had said it. Willie decided to let the matter sink into obscurity, as Golding was known to be a hefty fighter ; and he apologised to Fitzacher, becoming thenceforward firm friends with him.

When the swallows had left the withering sedges by the longpond, Willie felt miserable and thought that everything was gray and sad like the rainclouds that came from the west. The past summer had been so happy. It seemed one morning on his way to the Halt, that the wavelets hollow-lapping upon the eastern shore of the lake called to him, and he leaned against a willow, overcome by a sudden anguish. Every breeze loosened a shower of yellow leaves on his coat, each swaying of the sycamores scattered a risping of vaned seeds upon the air. The reeds, like lances of a færy cavalcade sunk into the gloomy deeps, shivered and were still, shivered and were still. He began to murmur his poem :

Over the fallow field crieth a lapwing,

and then he stopped, his eyes dim with tears. Quickly he glanced round to see if any one were looking, but the pathway was clear save for a crackey, with upright and barred tail, looking for insects : he gazed at the water again and wondered why he felt sad. With sudden understanding he realised that it was because the past never came again. The past was hopelessly gone. In fancy a picture of the mind was lighted ; it was spring, and Bob Lewis was sitting by his rearing field, wearing his fawn gaiters, and the first chiffchaff was piping. So vivid was the picture that he saw the dog rolling, and old Bob's hand upon his stick ; and that was past and dead.

Three perch drifted by, with striped sides and scarlet fins, but even the sight of these, straying from their holes, did not send away the heaviness. Willie forgot about the " moter " at the Halt, and when he did remember he knew that it was too late to catch it. Immediately he felt scared, but this

passed, and recklessness filled him. He would catch the next one at nine o'clock, and say that he had had a headache. Mr. Rore never disbelieved a boy when he pleaded a headache ; consequently an enormous number of senior boys had headaches when homework had not been done.

The black stripes and scarlet fins of the wandering perch were lost in the gloom of the water, more yellow slips left the wands of the willow, and the twirling sycamore seeds flipped among them. Willie thought of Elsie, without emotion, and wondered how she liked her new school in Belgium. A moorhen cranked among the reeds, a roach splashed ; once more he was lying by the hedge and watching her on the stile. He wondered if he would ever see her again ; next summer would never come. Somewhere he had read that the eyes were the windows of the soul, and as he repeated the line he thought how true it was. Yes, Elsie's soul shone from her eyes. She had a very beautiful soul. He wondered if he would marry her, and was alarmed at his boldness ; marriage was not to be thought of in the case of Elsie. The idea of such an eventual relation filled the introspective boy with alarm and almost a pain ; marriage was not true love, he knew. During his first term Chapman had jeered at him because he could not answer the questions about love and marriage asked him in the lavatory before an inquisition of Dennis, Evans, and a pale thin youth named Jedborough. They had laughed because he had wept when Dennis had explained certain details about his coming into the world ; and for weeks he had been miserable, brooding on the awfulness of it. Although that had soon passed, and he had wondered how he had been so silly ; but the thought of Elsie and marriage must not be allowed.

The wren was stittering from a bush its alarm at a prowling weazel. A dazed bluebottle fell into the water, too feeble to struggle ; Willie dropped a leaf near it, but a dace took it almost immediately. Through the clouds a red ball appeared. The wind swirled the vapours, the sun shed its dross and became silver, the rippled waters replied with fitful gleaming ; a cloud checked the radiance and the sun shrunk once more to a wan globe. But behind it was carding the mists, and its

loom of heat spinning them into cottony wisps that drifted ever eastwards. Soon the spinner showed its disc of red, the sunlight trailed down and the crackey uttered four short trills welcoming the warmth and the departure of the weazel.

Willie left the lake and wandered in the beech wood. The trees were glorious at the fall, the leaves kept their silkiness of texture and firmness of outline; only a few littered the ground with the bleached bluebell stalks and broken rust of the ferns. The sycamore leaves near the lake were blotched with black, for autumn had set its mark of bondage upon them; those of the hawthorn were withered, the elm leaves were a sickly yellow, the chestnut dropped its leaves when they were yet green, the oak allowed its own to shrivel, the elderberry and the alder soon became demoralised. But the beech was proud, and dyed the leaves a ruddy-brown upon its domed vastness; and one day it would bid them go, and give them to the earth intact. The sunshine lingered by a bramble bush and lit under its arches a soft green fire with here and there a spray burnt deep with red flame. A falling oak leaf was lacquered, the final glory of its passing. No song stole through the silence; autumn's torches left a mist in the valley. The home birds were soberly searching for food, the visitants were gone south. With tears the boy looked around, but there was nothing for him. There were no flowers, and the wild bees had left him. On the ground by his feet a ring of yellow feathers showed where a sparrowhawk had seized and plucked a corn bunting. No more would he sing his one song of summer, perched on a twig in the hedgerow, the song that said, so Granfer Will'um had once told him, *A little bit of bread and no-o cheese*. Wistfully the boy wondered why it was that one creature should live only by the death of another. The thought frightened him, as it had at other times. He loitered in the beechen groves for many minutes, wandering from bole to bole and bidding farewell to the brown leaves that the first wind would whirl away; a tall boy wearing an eton collar showing much-mended collar-holes above an old tie of his father's; clad in a threadbare norfolk suit; thin of leg; and on his back

a satchel of cheap brown leather from which stuck a pen. With a whirr of wings that spun the leaves a cock pheasant rose and hurtled away in front, crowing alarm. He flung a stick after the bird, the effort causing his jolted satchel to jab the pen into the fleshy part of his back, and this vicious reminder set him running towards the Halt.

He caught the fuming "moter" and arrived at the Masters' Entrance of Colham Grammar School about five-and-twenty minutes after his friends in Vc had gone to Mr. Beach for Latin, wondering if Mad Willie had been lucky enough to get diphtheria. Quietly he turned the brass nob of the door; it swung open, he closed it, and tiptoed across the tessellated floor. The toad-like gentleman in his portrait ignored him; he could hear the porter's voice in the basement somewhere, and then from the Sixth Form room adjoining the Head Master's study, a voice boomed:

"What's the matter wi' the boy? Is the boy e?"

Willie's heart trembled. Although he knew the danger of lingering by the model steamship, so near to the awful door, yet he listened.

"Can't hear, Sah!"

A mumbling noise followed.

"Come along, sah, I'll gie you that cane! Wasting my time like this! Porpah spirit, sah! Come along!"

An inner door—that leading from the Head Master's study to the adjoining Sixth Form room—opened and closed. Willie heard Mr. Rore walking quickly across the carpet, heard the rustle of a cane being selected from among its bundled fellows. A chair scraped upon that part of the floor uncovered by the worn and undersized carpet. Willie knew that the time was propitious for a skulk across Hall, thence into the class-room of Mr. Beach. Or he could hide in the lavatory till twenty minutes to ten, and join the slouching file into Mr. Croodbrane's for instruction in the principles of Electricity and Magnetism. Fascinated, he waited near the door, leaning nearer, and picturing the scene. A footfall sounded behind him, and his arm was gripped just above the elbow by the porter.

"Now then, you boy, whatteryoudoinere?"

Unfortunately at Colham Grammar School the liveried and little porter had no respect for those miserables who were (according to the prospectus) "inculcated with the spirit of discipline, a sense of values, and a blending of modern and classical instruction that should fit every pupil for the conflict of a mature life." Mr. Samuel Crinkle, an imported cockney, had lived so long in the bowels of the ancient school that in bodily and mental stature he was insignificant; nevertheless, he wore livery that would have fitted a big man; with the result that casual beholders were wont to wonder if his friends and intimates were afraid to tell him the truth about his appearance. Mr. Crinkle may have retained his youthful illusions about that appearance; or his uniform may have been an heirloom that no Colhamean porter could render threadbare enough to warrant the purchase of another. He behaved towards the boys as though he were a sergeant of Siberian conscripts; called them "you boy" and by their surnames; and when no master was present in Hall, he shouted in a shrill treble to those he considered to be offending against the exquisite moral tone of the school. When not visible to them after school hours he was haunting the cloakrooms, the corridors, and the wash-houses in a skulking and eavesdropping endeavour to detect boys smoking or etching crudities upon the walls.

"Now then, Maddison, what's the game, hey?"

"Nothing, porter, really."

"We'll soon see about that. Sent in to Mr. Rore for misbe'avour, hey? Wondering if you'll go in or not, hey? We'll soon see about that, young feller."

"I wasn't sent in, please, porter. I came to—to tell you that I wanted to stop to full lunch. I forgot to put my hand up when you came round."

"Oh, did you, now?"

"Yes, porter. May I, please?"

"You can ask Mr. Rore. For your private ear, young feller, I may hinform you that I 'aven't yet started to go round the class-rooms. 'Ow about that, hey? Telling lies, hey?"

He still held the thin bone of Willie's upper arm, and

now he gripped it harder, turning gently so that the boy turned with him. Three thwacks sounded in the study, the murmurous chant of Mr. Rore, the scraping of a chair. Crinkle tapped on the door, was ordered to come in.

"Well, portah?"

"If you please, Sir, I caught Maddison listening at the door and grinning all over 'is face. He told me that he wanted to put 'is name down for full lunch, 'aving missed me morning round. Well, Sir, I 'aven't yet been round on me morning round."

"Well, Maddison?" asked the master to the trembling boy.

Willie looked on the ground.

"Answer me, sah!" blared Mr. Rore.

His keen glance was on him, he towered above, his eyes cold as blue-green water flowing under ice. All his great power and personality seemed to be in those eyes, and to enter the brain of the thin brown-eyed youth in front of him, numbing it and searching every thought that came, that flurried and died in it, leaving him, with his paled cheeks, like a dead thing. Mr. Rore felt scorn for what he considered a lazy and indolent boy, one hypocritical and without any sense of honour: one who later in life would be not only negative to any community in which he might dwell, but a hindrance. He knew him to be a slacker, and a liar; and a boy, moreover, who had a decided and adverse influence over his fellows: because he had a subtle brain. It was perhaps three seconds before Mr. Rore spoke again, in his voice scorn and almost a loathing of the boy before him who could not look him in the eyes. Three seconds only, but in that time he saw the opposed positions and his own righteousness in their naked simplicity. He was trying to mould character and make men: almost in vain he tried to break the bars of brass: vice must be stamped out like a plague!

"Have you just arrived?"

"Yes, Sir."

"You know that it is forbidden to steal in at the Masters' Entrance?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Wasting my time! Be careful, sah, be careful! You will have to leave the school, sah! Why were you late?"

"I stopped by the lake and forgot the time, please, Sir."

"You what? I can't hear! Use your lips and teeth, sah!"

"Yes, Sir."

"Good Heavens, the boy's e! The bad lad's mad! Porpah spirit, sah! Supposing we all forgot the time and lingered by water, sah, eating the lotus! You are a savage, a Black Man!! To lie on your back and let ripe bananas drop into your mouth, sah! And where is the Black Man now, sah? Degenerate, flabby, a porpah spirit. That is the fate of the Nigrescent Human, sah! Come along, sah, come along, I'll gie you that cane!"

Samuel Crinkle retired, and Willie followed the Head Master into the study. In the Sixth Form room the boys had adjusted their mucked turns, and were conning the new lines. But the door was thick, and no sound came through, otherwise Mr. Rore would have heard various whispered remarks.

"For God's sake, lend me your dictionary, Davis."

"Collins, you fool, why did you muck your bit;"

"Thorpe, you go on from line 344";

"Some poor swine getting the whack again;"

"I say, what does *juncus* mean?"

and the extracts of a love letter read to a few amused friends by the captain of the First Eleven named Nosey Fortescue.

Inside the study the poor swine was bending over a yellow chair, pressing tongue into dry palate in an effort to keep back the tears; Mr. Rore dismissed him peremptorily, and without his usual aloof gravity. He went out, and blinked for a moment by the model steamship to dry his eyes, then went into Hall. As he left the tiled floor his satchel swung round and the pen that had pierced its leather gave him through his trousers a venomous jab as though it were in league with his late castigator. In temper Willie crushed it under his heel and threw it down the grating, sending after it a contemptuous spittle.

He knocked at the door of Vc classroom and entered with the same thrill that an immature tragedian experiences when bathed in limelight and advancing towards a tinsel extermination he hears an unsophisticated audience groan with misery.

Jack winked, and Bony grinned. Clemow and Hoys, like two birds roosting together, looked up from a begrimed copy of *de Bello Gallico* and peered at him. The fluent translation of Fitzacher ceased, and the whole of 5c stared. Willie closed the door, and stood before Mr. Beach, who with a long blue pencil was tapping a portion of the desk in front of him.

"Well, and what do you want?"

"Nothing, Sir," replied Willie, striking a graceful attitude.

"Take it and go," muttered Effish.

"Quiet, that boy, quiet," Mr. Beach mumbled, thumping the desk with his uncut pencil.

Vc giggled, and Effish dropped a pen, which slid down a grating.

"Where you been, boy?"

"Into the Head Master, Sir."

"Late?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Why?"

"Overslepp 'isself, the poor che-ild," whispered Bony, who was sitting, or was rather wedged, in one of the front desks.

"You've guessed my secret," replied Willie, turning to Bony.

Effish was on his knees, and tugging at the grating. A hum became audible.

"Not so much noise," suggested Mr. Beach. "Effish, drop that grating!"

Effish dropped it with a clanging sound. Vc laughed without restraint.

"Come here, that boy. Get it."

Effish wobbled from his seat, turning round as he did so, tongue in cheek, and went to a corner. With unnecessary

clattering, he brought forth an attenuated and black stick with pieces of cloth adhering to it.

"Come here," ordered the master, leaping from his raised seat. "Bend over, both of you."

They bent over a desk, winking confidently to Vc. Mr. Beach hit them with artificial fierceness; he rarely caned a boy in the Head Master's study, preferring to use a map-lath in his own room.

He was a man not very tall, gray-haired, with the profile of a tired Greek god, patient-eyed and tolerant of terrestrial imperfection. To the boys, however, he was merely "Old Scratch." Had the derivation of this title ever been sought in discussion by one of the annual Sixth Form debates it would probably have remained hidden, for neither the temper nor the person of Mr. Beach were ever irritated sufficiently by boy or flea to warrant it. Where other masters of a lesser understanding than Mr. Beach would be disturbed, he maintained his olympian calm. Even when Dove minor, an Irish boy, scatter-brained and for ever on the verge of running-away-to-sea, had put three spiders in his inkpot, he had merely thrown it out of the window and not at Dove minor; and Vc had regarded him as a sportsman when he had given Dove minor ten thousand lines of Virgil to copy out (afterwards reducing them to ten) for lighting a fire in the wastepaper basket during a break and not reporting him to the Head Master, as surely as any of his colleagues would have done. In nearly every boyish offence—arising from high-spirits—he used Discretion, as the map-lath was called.

Old Scratch made a display of hitting the trousers of Willie and Effish, and then told them to get back to their desks. Afterwards he resumed his play with the uncut pencil.

"Whose turn is it?" he inquired gruffly.

"Mine, Sir," replied the respectfully modulated voice of Fitzacher. So Fitzacher continued. He spoke slowly, and at his perfect translation Mr. Beach's face showed animation. He was fond of Fitzacher, and Fitzacher liked Latin. After half a page (one-quarter of the prepared amount) his neighbour Macarthy went on. Macarthy was one of those boys who

neither distinguish nor disgrace themselves at school. His nuts-and-bolts hobby had been discarded during the vacation ever since he had become friendly with a junior master of the despised Colham Modern School, who helped him with his homework and sometimes asked him to tea. Macarthy made an indifferent rendering of four lines, and then Slater was told to go on. Slater was a fat boy with hair the colour of a blood-orange, thick lips, and enormous freckles. He did not play games, owing to a mythical weak heart; he walked like a girl, was known to be able to dance, and occasionally wore button boots. He answered invariably whenever any one yelled "Aunt Sally."

One of the fallow Golding twins followed, and by asking an earnest question about the root of *coagi* managed after Mr. Beach's discussion to pass his turn on to an ignorant neighbour, thus demonstrating to that flummuxed youth the fact that an ikeymo will exist by the work of others whenever possible.

Yeates, the ignorant neighbour, pale of face and with large blue eyes that dreamed undisturbedly of nothing in particular, endeavoured to disembed his molar teeth from a conglomeration of cheap sweets, three pounds costing a shilling, known as american gums, but without success. Abandoning the efforts that gave his face an aspect of femetic malevolence he stared at the book before him with a scowl, trusting in his reputation of being a fool to extricate him from the position. Mr. Beach, after two bouts of shouting, called him out in front and used Discretion. Yeates crept back to his seat, the american gums still dominating his facial muscles.

Effish maintained his part of a poor buffoon, and attempted an argument about thunderclouds, but Mr. Beach told him to stand out in front and not to be an insolent fool. Beckelt bungled his piece, was picked up readily by Clemow without an indication from the master (Clemow and Hoys shared a crib between them, and so far they had not been caught), Hoys continued with an easy mastery that made envy in the hearts of 5c, and then the bell announced termination of Latin. Willie breathed deeply in relief, since it was his

turn after Hoys, and he had prepared nothing. For two hours the night before he had been writing with the fervour of misery in a reformed exercise book that bore upon its first page the legend,—

*Strictly Private. For only Me.
Being an Official Diary of Observations
of What I have Seen of Birds and Others.
Strictly Private signed Will Maddison the
Bird-Man of Rookhurst.*

This journal, which was almost illegible, contained chiefly allusions to owls, fish, birds, and accounts of expeditions with Jack. He hid it under his floor, along with his catapult, a box of home-made tobacco, a pipe, and a disappointing book that once he had traded with Golding for two kingfishers' eggs, called, *What a Young Mother Should Know*.

Vc liked Thursday mornings, as the first three "hours" were spent with those masters who did not enforce a spartanic discipline. The boys left the class-room and Mr. Beach striking at flies with his pencil, and meandered through a line of brown varnished desks at which sat the bored Specials, under the polished horizontal bar, by the ladders and the parallel bars and the vaulting horse at which in the past so many jabs with impotent pen-holders had been made, alongside the shiny glass case with the lacquered instruments arrayed within, and past a stout man who, with open mouth, lounged in the doorway. "Come along there—don't lag behind Vc—you're always late you bors," murmured the stout man, apparently to the dusty beams high overhead. The incoming class took not the slightest notice of his words, but continued to trickle in the doorway. Some indeed paused to inspect the pinned sheets of *The Sphere*, *The Illustrated London News*, and *The Graphic* that Mr. Kenneth, the English master, considerably brought from the Common Room, after three weeks or a month of casual perusal by the Masters; thus the boys were enabled to know what had gone on in the Great World Outside seven or eight weeks before.

In the doorway lounged Mr. Croodbrane, called Taffy. It was he who had reduced the tone of the school piano to that of a choir of rusted jewsharps; it was he who every morning upon the piano played the Latin Hymn composed by the late Dr. Bullnote, D.D., preceded and followed by *The War March of the Priests*, which melody had been drummed into an unmusical consciousness when a boy by a knuckle-rapping and female tutor. It was he whose hands were so large and heavy and hairy and ready to clump the heads of little and of big alike; it was he who taught Electricity and Magnetism and Sound and Light; it was he who had an enormously long upper lip, half covered with a moustache like a furze bush; it was he who by his tremendous humour was reputed among certain boys to be a contributor to *Punch*.

"Come along there d'you hear—don't prevaricate you bors—hurry up close the door Maddison—take out your homework and stop talking. No Effish you can't have another window open—what d'you suppose the Guv'nus supply hot water-pipes for—to freeze little silly bors with, ahha, wha'?"

Vc in a long line fumbling at satchels laughed easily. Mr. Croodbrane, pleased with his wit, opened his mouth and curled his tongue upwards into the cavity. This queer habit had been formed by continual repressions of a desire to laugh at his own witty tardiloquence.

"No, sir," moaned Effish, "only my head feels rather close in here, Sir."

"Ahha, um," mumbled the Physics master, "very probably, um. Very probably"—he looked up and down the line of boys, and Vc knew that clumsy sarcasm was coming—"very probably, um. So, I should imagine, would an egg feel it close when the mother hen is sitting on it. It means that it is getting addled, Effish. Your head feels close, you say, Effish, ahha, wha'?"

Vc rippled a forced laugh.

"Yes, Sir, I feel just as if an old hen was trying to addle me."

The class roared and danced. Mr. Croodbrane's tongue uncurled, resumed its normal position, and then retired into obscurity behind his shut mouth. He frowned, took off his

spectacles, wiped them, perched them upon his massive nose, and frowned again.

"Ah yes, Effish. Little bors should not be rude and impertinent. Come here, little bor—no no, Effish—don't wriggle away—now then—just remember that you mustn't be—rude—or call out like a craven when retribution overtakes you—now go back to your place. Bors, show up homework!"

Effish returned to the line and held his head woefully, which had received six clumps from Mr. Croodbrane's hand. His head hurt, for besides being clumped by a hand like a foot Mr. Croodbrane wore upon his little finger an enormous gold signet ring that even the deep engraving of a heraldic crest with motto did not disguise its potentialities as a knuckle-duster. Everybody hated the ring, and once Terence Dove had attempted to remove it in the belief that its owner would not notice his action since he was looking away and his hand was spread out on a bench beside him. On that occasion Dove's head had resounded hollowly to repeated knockings and the pain had made him butt his tormentor in the stomach. Dove had been thrashed, and the next day had been found at Wintersea, sixty miles away, trying to sign on as a cabin boy. The following day, however, he was back again at school, harum-scarum and beloved by all as before.

The master moved down the line of boys, collecting sheets of ruled paper defiled by various diagrams and written explanations that purported to represent an hour's study the night before. He passed quickly from boy to boy, saying "yours?"—"yours?"—"yours?" as he did so. Always he began at the left end of the room, and by a previous arrangement, Power, Sheppard, Bryers, Fitzacher, Walton, Swann, Macarthy, and others who usually had something to show up, gathered at that end. Competition for place was usually intense at the other end among certain boys who usually had nothing to show up. The reason of this was sound, like the so-called mysteries of all natural phenomena.

Mr. Croodbrane had passed the tenth boy, and iterated "yours?" for the eleventh time when Willie and Effish,

by crawling with silent speed on hands and knees round the benches, appeared suddenly among that section whose work had been collected. Jack and Yeates followed, and each time the line obligingly shuffled to fill the gap. Dove and Bony came next, and a thin dark boy with brambly eyebrows and piercing eyes called Barnes, whose facial resemblance to a stuffed female sparrowhawk was often commented on by the members of the C.G.S.N.H.A.F.B.C. "Yours?—yours?—yours?" grunted Mr. Croodbrane. "Any bor not given up his homework—right—Golding and Clemow put out the apparatus—Effish, leave that pithball alone—you'll break it."

Golding and Clemow seized various apparatus that rested upon a shelf, and commenced to place them on the benches directed by the master. Golding made a pretence of carrying his selected burdens with the greatest care, thus ensuring for himself a minimum of labour and eliciting approval from Mr. Croodbrane whose face had taken on a dazed vacuity. Soon upon the mahogany-varnished benches lay Wimhurst machines, Leyden jars, bar-magnets, iron filings, rods of steel, brass, vulcanite, glass, and wood, moulting catskins of various shades and patterns, silk and satin rubbers, pithballs, compasses, wet cells connected in series, galvanometers, voltmeters, ampmeters, and a cumbersome affair of tarnished brass that every boy tried to avoid called a Wheatstone Bridge. Vc assorted itself into pairs, each of which attached itself to one end of a bench. Work began. Notes were taken. Conversations were subdued but insistent. Mr. Croodbrane continued to stare into eternity, or it may have been the flies on the ceiling. He came out of his trance only when Effish, having persuaded his partner Beckelt to hold the two nickel nobbs connected with the tin-foiled glass cylinders of the Wimhurst machine, turned the wheel suddenly with the result that Beckelt yelled with the shock and fell writhing upon the floor. With stoical indifference their heads were clumped and then banged together, and Mr. Croodbrane passed from pair to pair unintelligently explaining the unintelligible principles of Electricity and Magnetism. After a quarter of an hour's note-taking, explanatory confusion, and surreptitious talking,

the pairs moved round, and Willie and Jack exchanged the boring study of magnets with research among the interesting catskins, for by rubbing vulcanite nobbs violently with these, and then holding them near the ears of other boys, it was possible to produce a faint spark upon them. Bony and Rupert took their turn with the despised bar-magnets, and Effish felt jealous when he observed Bony placing one down the neck of Aunt Sally, thus giving him a surprise—Effish had not thought of that delight himself. Of course it was observed and his cropped head clumped. Bony went back grinning that his secret had been guessed. Trying to outshine this ingenuity, Effish emptied some iron-filings down Fitzmacher's neck and was sent in to the Head Master. This casualty produced a remarked if temporary change in the stuffy atmosphere of the laboratory. Then the second bell sounded, reminding them that only another three-quarters of an hour with a miserable ten minutes break remained before the welcome visitation to Mr. Spiegelmann for Oral French must be made. Quickly the time passed, while the room grew hotter and the plane trees outside loosened their leaves against the water-flawed window panes, and the sparrows in the gutter chirped indistinctly. Effish returned after half an hour, limping almost imperceptibly and with his right hand pressed to his seat as though he suffered pain. He stared pathetically at Taffy, who opened his mouth, curled his tongue, and grunted sardonically. Vc guffawed, not at Effish, but at Mr. Croodbrane, for it knew that he had been nowhere near the Sixth Form room.

" Ahha, the penitent returns, Effish, wha' ? "

" Yes, Sir."

" A warning, bors, that we must not play with fire, wha' ? Little bors that play with iron-filings, um—around a candle, wha' ?—must expect to get their hides tanned, ahha, wha' ? "

" Yes, Sir."

" Of course," went on the humorist, pausing while he opened his cavernous mouth the wider, in order, Willie thought, to allow more freedom for his tongue, " Of course, our friend Watson little knows how he plays with fire. Or,

shall we say, um, the Siamese Twins, um—Maddison and Temperley. Fire burns, little bors—a good master but a bad servant, um—as they say. Have you been bringing any more, um—any more stuffed elephants to school lately—Maddison, ahha, wha' ? ”

This funny allusion to a plover stuffed by Willie and presented to Mr. Worth (after it had provided a day's enjoyment for the class) was an inevitable remark of Mr. Crood-brane. Sometimes he spoke of “ the example of the taxidermist's art,” or “ deceased feline ” ; his was not the wit that would exhaust a topic by unvaried repetition. His reward was assured, for laughter always followed.

Vc was content. Anything was better than work, and Taffy was never deliberately unfair or irritable. And in his heart everybody had a shy liking for him, for they respected him. He had not forgotten what, as a boy, he had thought of his own masters. They were sorry to leave him when the bell rang.

Noisily Vc settled in the forms while Mr. Spiegelmann perched like a little withered climbing animal upon the high stool that enabled him just to peer over the desk in front. On other days, the desk was usually occupied by a junior master named Ellison while he “ took ” his little boys of 3c class ; but Mr. Spiegelmann was an intermittent visitant to the school, coming only on Tuesdays and Thursdays to instruct what were called the senior boys in conversational French and German. Two days a week could hardly be firm enough foundation for any claim to a better class-room or a better desk ; so, while Mr. Ellison watched his little boys in the damp workshop reducing with blunt tools small pieces of wood to chips and shavings, his room was filled with senior boys, and, usually, Mr. Spiegelmann's theories upon Art, Life, Death, Education, and their relation to Serenity.

Invariably Mr. Spiegelmann began his address with a brisk query about whatever French book the class before him was supposed to be reading, but after a minute or so his ideas would soar from mere printed pages. Back to earth they would float while he explained that he had a Bavarian father and a French mother, but no connection whatsoever

with what he called *les sacrés prusses*. So eager was he upon every occasion to establish this in the minds of all, that during many years his face had shrunk and its surface become lined, like a clayey field over which many carts have passed. Deep and dark ruts were impressed in parallel groups upon his forehead, his cheeks, and his chin. His eyes had evaporated most of their colour under the heat of his denunciation of *les sacrés prusses*, and were now the hue of absinthe drops in water within a thick glass. Mr. Spiegelmann was very small, his voice was rasping and earnest, and he wore with very tight trousers and a sack-like coat, yellow leather boots that buttoned up and resembled the skins of over-ripe Canary bananas. With the cracked and pointed toecaps of these he sometimes beat a rhythmical tattoo upon the platform of the desk.

Vc under Mr. Spiegelmann had an air of luxurious indolence. Those boys with hollow temperaments fell back upon the old pastime of noughts-and-crosses; others read "bloods" under the desk or whispered to their neighbours. Spitty was a harmless master, only feared for his one power, that of ejecting rowdy boys "into the Head Master." The reading in French and then the translation of prepared extracts of *Lettres de mon Moulin* would have been a combined problem practically insoluble by Vc, suffering under the double handicap of Anglo-Saxon birth and laziness, had not Mr. Spiegelmann possessed a gratifying habit of doing both beforehand. Perhaps a philosophy bred from his gallo-teutonic blood enabled him to perceive both the futility of all attempts to render the average schoolboy bilingual, and the utility of the salary that such inanities involved. At any rate, perched upon the ridiculously high stool like something that had climbed there and was fearful of descent, Mr. Spiegelmann showed no irritability, but only weariness bordering upon exhaustion. Sometimes a boy, by judicious seizure of an opening, embarked the master upon the perilous seas of poetical discussion in færy lands forlorn (as he himself would declare).

"Now then," he began briskly, "let us get on with a little French rendition. Let us see, what page is it? One

hundert un one. Ah yes, I have made my mark in pencil. Who must commence, eh? "

Effish raised a hand.

" Ah 'im, yes, that's all right," assented Mr. Spielgelmann, and forthwith began to read aloud, while Effish followed.

After awhile Macarthy asked permission to speak.

" Please, Sir, would you call this book a prose poem? "

" Ah! " nearly yelled Mr. Spielgelmann, " ah, there we 'aves a theenker! That boy will go far, I bet so. It is a difficult thing, my lad. What is zis poetry? Just verse? Nunno. Poetry is ze grand thought, ze idea magnifique. Boys, ze mastering of ze language is ze greatest thing in ze ol universe. Ah yes, I think so. Look at me, now. Do I spik ze parfait English? Do I spik ze goot Frainch? Ze deep German? I am not like ze other masters 'ere, like 'im next door, teaching nodings! Nunno. I do not believe in ze stupid arcs and squares of Euclid, you call him, eh? Or ze arithmetic and muldyplocation table, nunno. Serenity should be ze aim of every man, woman, and child. Look 'ere, I spik English, Frainch, German, Spanish, Italian, a lot of Latin and Greek, and what goot 'as it done me? Look 'ere at me and regard. I 'ave it all 'ere "—Mr. Spielgelmann ceased the waving of one thin hand and tapped his wrinkled forehead—" Roosian I 'ave, because all ze magnifique works of ze sombre Roosian are wrote in Frainch. Look 'ere, I can read ze mighty works of Tolstoi and Dostoievsky, of——"

" Poppoffquickski? " asked Effish, with innocent seriousness.

" Nunno, none of 'im. 'E is a potboiler. No goot, I read 'im not. Look 'ere, in ze beautiful Frainch language I can read Dostoievsky, Tolstoi, Turgenev—what prose poems flowed from the pen'older of that great serene man! *Ze Torrents of Spring!* Ah boy, learn Frainch and not mattematique! Nunno. And in my country, what men 'ave we? Look 'ere, Molière, Flaubert, de Goncourt, Dumas, Zola—ah, Emile Zola, a god! Watson, did you throw that book at 'im? What you mean, I 'ave guess your secret? Go in to 'Edmaster! Go on, out of it. Listen 'ere, you boys, I am not like ze other masters. Language is the gift of

intelligence! Look 'ere, I spik English well, am I not parfait? Vraiment, you get me, as the patois is! I 'ave read all Geebee Shaw. Once I met 'im, and argued with 'im for 'alf-an-'our. Mon Dieu, how my head ached! I read your Shakespeare, your Milton—*l'Allegro, Il Penseroso*, and ze great *Paradise Hidden* and *Paradise Decouvert*! Magnifique, l'aveugle Milton. And then Keats, and Shelley, Swinburne, and Robert Burns, even 'is barbarous patois I comprehend because of my mastery of language."

Mr. Spiegelmann paused; his moustache he fiercely twirled. His rugous face sunk into his shoulders, giving him a resemblance to a monkey, detained involuntarily at the London Zoological Gardens, who has cracked a bad nut presented by a humanitarian sightseer.

"Music and language should be taught to ivry boy," he began, when Effish again interrupted.

"Oh, Sir, we're going to learn *Tannhauser* for next Speech Day, Sir, Mr. Weeds said."

"Ah, your Mr. Weeds is a man of serenity, like me. *Tannhauser*! Ze immortal Wagner! Magnifique! Look 'ere, I travel and learn ze language, and in ze eveniks I go to l'opera! I ear Mozart and Wagner, and drim my drims of serenity. I listen to *Siegfried*—you 'ave 'erd 'im *sans doute*—and *I Pagliacci*, *La Bohème*, and *Péléas et Mélisande*! Beautiful, beautiful! In Milan I listen to *Tristan und Isolde*, *Tannhauser*, *Boris Godounov*, *Ivan le Terrible*, and all those sombre Roosians. I listen to 'im in Frainch, Italian, and German! Zat is what my 'ed 'as done for me. Look 'ere, I know nothing of circles and arcs and all that foolish nonsense of Euclid or Arithmetics. Nunno. I learn Grik! You spik Grik, yes no? Ah! Sophocles, Æschylus, Plato! What serenity, what philosophy!"

"Do the Germans read Greek and Latin, Sir?" lisped Fitzacher, trying to be daring.

"Ze goot Germans, yes. But you must take care about 'im. Ze goot Germans are in ze south. Ze bad fellows in ze nord."

"Lay sacray proose," growled Effish.

"Pig-dogs," chortled Cerr-Nore.

"You get 'im, boys," yelled Mr. Spielgelmann, "*les sacrés prusses*. Ah, they 'ave no advancement. Ceevee-leezation as collected its lowest types, its scoriæ, and gathered them in ze nord. But in ze south are ze advanced Germans. Look 'ere, what boys 'ave read Nietzsche? None? Any'ow, look 'ow he loathe ze Germans. A great man! 'Is book was for mankind, and not for one race. Ah, ze bullies!"

He thumped the desk with violence, then went on earnestly, "Listen to me, boys. What you think of—

Kenst dü das Land wö sie citiönen blüen?

That is ze work of ze immortal Johann Wolfgang von Goethe! Is it not incompar-able? 'Ave you peruse *Faust*? Well, there is plenty of time. Then there is Schiller, Heine, Körner, and Lessing. Ah, yes. What you want, Effish?"

"Please, Sir, may I go out? I feel rather faint, Sir. My heads hums peculiarly, Sir."

"Certainly, my boy, certainly."

"Thank you, Sir."

Effish shuffled out, coughing dismally.

Mr. Spielgelmann's discourse appeared to Vc as being utter rot, but nevertheless welcome on account of its time-wasting value. Very few of them learnt German, which was an additional subject. Fitzacher, sitting quietly in a desk with a bespectacled and pale boy named Swann, thought that the quotation from *Mignon* was very beautiful, but he was the only boy who listened to the master's sonorously earnest endeavour to make Vc understand the beauty of poetry.

The lesson continued, Bony returned with a skull-like grin, Effish came back ten minutes afterwards licking his lips, and whispered to those near him that he had climbed the lower playground gate and slipped down to Old Mother Vandenberg's at the bottom of Colham Hill. Towards the end of the morning Cerr-Nore's head was in his arms upon the desk and supporting a miniature hat of paper perched grotesquely upon his hair by the boy behind him. Several times Mr. Spielgelmann galloped away with his theories of

education, and with wild eyes and waving arms explained how serene was his mind, since he was able to read the great works of all nations. Willie quietly wrote in his *Official Diary of Observations of What I have Seen of Birds and Others*, exchanging it afterwards, in spite of its advertised privacy, with Bony's briefer *Notes*. Underneath this seeming act of indiscretion existed rivalry, for both wrote paragraphs specially to bluff the other. Thus Willie read in the other exercise book :—

I wish I could trust a certain dark chap. But I can't. I would like to take him next spring to my preserves. But I daren't. Is he honest I wonder. Perhaps he would rag my nests with a certain friend of his. God preserve me from any disselusion. Years ago this chap sold me a carrion crow, young, saying it was a jackdaw. Unclean canine. Also some hen's eggs painted, saying it was a hawk's. Dirty dog. But I wish we could be friends. Sometimes he is quite a decent bloke. Wow-wow !

He read this with a pleased feeling, and was sorry that he had not been kinder to Bony. Bony would perhaps be hurt by his own entry :

To-day I watched autumn coming in, and was late, unfortunately. Got six. Carrambo. I saw a magpie's in an ash, unsuspected before. I must mark the place in case a Kestrel's in there next year. Certain fellows in my class are decent, others are rotten. I prefer a certain man to another tall one, because the tall one wrote last year to Colonel T——y asking for a permit. Also to the Dowager Countess of S——e for fishing. It is my opinion that a treecreeper will nest in a certain rotten tree in a certain spinney next spring. But I will tell no one, since I can unfortunately trust only Temperley. It is a pity, because I like a certain very tall chap rather well, and he is in the Owl Club. I must write no more now. More to-morrow.

Soon after a surreptitious returning of manuscripts had been made the bell rang, Mr. Spiegelmann leapt from the

chair and left the rowdy class-room to itself. Vc rushed back to its form-master, Mr. Beach, flung satchels and books in desks, and rushed out into the playground, to discover that a depressing rain was falling and that no football was possible in the lower playground. Willie told Jack of his interview with the Head Master, omitting some details and supplying others more compatible with his present optimism. So happy, indeed, was he at having still another past "whack" to his credit, that he suggested a quick game of fives in the upper playground. The Governors apparently having considered that one court was sufficient for nearly four hundred boys, it frequently happened that this game was played against the windows of class-rooms. Some masters objected to the thud of balls against their casements, and for this reason fives was forbidden except in the solitary court. Willie was certain that Ratpoison had gone home to lunch, and Jack agreed with him that Ratpoison's windows were most meet-to-be-smirched with their pill—a degenerate tennis ball without its skin. Jack served to Willie who, to demonstrate his high-spirits returned it so violently that it entered 4b class-room with the greater part of the pane. Almost immediately a casement was opened and an object was poked out—an object like two cochinel-line cherries on which were glued twin chips off a blue enamel saucepan and a piece of frayed rope. The dismayed Jack was thunderously commanded to be outside the Head Master's study at two o'clock. Willie crouching under the window was unobserved. Afterwards to a small crowd he lauded Jack's heroism, explaining that himself was still convalescent from the whack that morning; and telling them how perfect was a friendship that divided pocket-money, home-work, birds' eggs, and canings.

THE BULLNOTE MEMORIAL

AUTUMN's fire was quenched in wintry rains that bore down the lingering coloured leaves and beat them into the earth. Willie and Jack played hard football, the latter being in the

First Fifteen. Occasionally they pleaded indisposition and went poaching. Once they set out with Bob Lewis, George Davidson, Tom Sorrell, and Job Boon the cobbler to ferret a wychel spinney famous for rabbits. Jack had borrowed Big Will'um's pitted twelve-bore, and the boys managed to fire eighteen cartridges between them, obtaining nine rabbits, a yellowhammer, and a bottle flung high by the quarryman. Willie was pleased with his skill, and explained to Jack that as the shot glanced off a bottle unless a direct hit was obtained, his eye must be fairly keen. His elation was somewhat modified when, owing to excitement and a rabbit that would not bolt, he fired into a hole from where it was peeping only four feet away. Amid a chorus of dang-uns he handed the gun over to Jack for the rest of the darkling afternoon. He felt shamed at his lack of sportsmanship, and went home depressed to do his home-work. At tea his father told him that his cousin Phillip from Brockley would be staying with them during the Christmas holidays. Willie had only seen this despised cousin on one occasion, when he was little and he had gone with him and others to the Zoo in London. Then Phillip had fallen down between the platform and the still train-wheels, and later spoiled his own enjoyment by eating too much chocolate from an automatic machine that in return for five pennies had produced five slabs of moist warm chocolate. Whenever Willie remembered his cousin, he thought of him as a naughty boy in a sailor suit clutching the chocolate and smearing his face with it.

"He's a very clever boy, I believe," said Mr. Maddison. "Your Uncle Richard wrote me the other day and asked if he could come, as Phillip has not been very well. You will be his host, remember. I'll give you a stamp if you like, and you can write to him."

"I thought——" began Willie, then stopped.

"Well?"

"Oh, nothing."

"What did you think? I shan't eat you," remonstrated his father, pensively smoothing his moustache.

"Oh, well, Father, I was going to say that I thought that you and Uncle Dick weren't very friendly."

"Is that any reason why his boy shouldn't come here? I thought you would like it."

"Oh, I do, Father," Willie broke in. He wondered why his father always seemed to take things the wrong way.

"Besides, if you are going to live at Brockley——"

"Brockley, Father?"

"Your Uncle Richard lives at Brockley, a very depressing place in the south-east of London, and inhabited, if my memory serves me, by people still more depressing."

"But am I going to live there?" cried the boy, a sudden fear in his heart.

"Don't look so frightened, my boy. Any one would think by the look in your eyes you were so fond of us all that it would break your heart to leave us," his father replied, a faint bitterness in his voice. "As a matter of fact, I do not suppose that you will ever live with your uncle, unless the idea of Australia appals you still further."

"Oh, Father, but why must I go away. What have I done?"

Then he realised. Mr. Rore was going to expel him, as he had threatened a dozen times. He must have discovered who put the carbide in Ratpoison's inkwell the other evening. Or perhaps he had seen him smoking one of his Cuban Banderleerianos in the train two days ago. Possibly even Taffy had found out who sneaked one of his little compasses and a coil of copper wire. He blinked quickly, not wishing his father to know that the idea of leaving the woods and forests and Jack and all the other things was so terrible.

"You've done nothing, Willie, so far as I know. Not even any work at school. Guilty conscience, I suppose! But do you realise that you are growing up, and that very soon you will be a man, and that you will have to earn your own living? You've shown absolutely no bent for anything. What did Mr. Rore write last time in reference to your conduct: *He should not go out of his way to deceive*. Heaven knows where you get it from. Well, you seem to like an out-of-door life. Your Uncle Richard wrote to me and suggested that Phillip and yourself should go to Australia together next year, or the year after, and learn farming at

the Sydney Agricultural College. I think it a sound idea. What do you think?"

Willie looked at the ground, and swallowed; but the swelled feeling in his throat remained. He tried to speak, but could not.

"Of course," went on Mr. Maddison, crossing one leg over the other and resting his chin on his hand. "I do not wish to force you into anything. My own father did his best to ruin my life, but I am not like him, and I do not think you are quite like I was. But still, that is nothing to do with the question. He died, as you know, a confirmed drunkard, leaving nothing but debts which your Uncle Richard and myself had to pay off. Now about the question of your career. As I said, you have shown no keenness in any direction whatever, as regards sensible hobbies even. Birds' nesting I do not consider important, as you apparently do. Usually one passes out of that stage at ten or eleven years of age. Now if the idea of going to Australia with your cousin Phillip appals you, as seemingly it does, there is one other thing open to you. As you know, I am a poor man. I cannot afford to give you a long professional training. Besides, what would you do if I did?"

"Did what, Father?"

"What? What I said, of course. If you will try and scrape a hole in the arm of that chair with your nail, and not listen to me, I suppose you will."

"I was only rubbing, Father."

"Don't argue with me. I distinctly saw you trying to pick a hole in the covering. And that reminds me. Did you take one of the laces out of my boots the other day?"

"Yes, Father, I was——"

"Oh, were you? Well, I wish you wouldn't do it. It isn't as though you asked me first. You never do ask me. I suppose it is in keeping with your creepy-crawly nature. Also there's another thing, my boy. I have missed three of my cigars. Do you know anything about it?"

"No, Father," Willie lied, wondering if Big Will'um had told any one.

"Well, I do not believe you. What have you to say to

that? Nothing. You keep silent. Will you leave that arm-chair alone!"

"I'm—I'm sorry, Father."

"Oh, it's all very well to say that you're sorry. You always exclaim that you are sorry, but it gets no further than exclamation. But being sorry is not enough. Then you did take the cigars?"

"No, Father."

"Oh, very well, we will say no more about it. I suppose that Biddy has taken to smoking them among her other vices, which are numberless, and include the habit of considering herself my grandmother. But still, to resume the matter in hand. I am quite willing to discuss anything with you, only you never seem willing to confide in me. Anybody would think that I was a disagreeable, unpleasant bully! What did you say?"

"Nothing, Father. Only——"

"Well?"

"Only, well, I don't think you a bully, Father," said the boy timidly, looking on the floor.

"That's very good of you," his father assured him dryly. "But about Australia. Your Uncle Richard has sent me a prospectus. The college takes students for two years, and then finds them billets on sheep stations, or fruit farms. How would you like it?"

Willie shuffled in the old horsehair arm-chair. His heart ached. Australia was many thousand miles away; there were cactus trees, snakes, eternal deserts and no songbirds. So much he knew from casual study of a geography book.

"The alternative," remarked his father, looking sideways out of the window and scratching his beard, "appears to be a city life. Tragic, but there you are. Your Uncle Richard is an official in the Moon Fire Office: at least, he has to wear every day a morning coat and a silk hat. This, I believe, distinguishes the employees of the Moon Fire Office from other and less discriminating Insurance Companies. However, you will have to wear those clothes, and not me. How would you like to be an official in the Moon Fire Office?"

The idea appalled Willie, coming so suddenly as it did.

He had never thought of his career before, except vaguely, when he had dreamed of an existence in the woods and meadows, photographing birds' nests and writing in *The Field* an account of his observations. That had seemed an ideal existence. Sometimes at school a little group of intimates had discussed a halcyon future in those dim and far-off days when they would grow up and be free and happy for ever. Macarthy was sure that if he were permitted an untrammelled choice he would be a great designer and even contribute to the *Model Engineer*. Beckelt would like to be a light-weight boxer in a booth ; it was his ideal to see himself stripped and pink and fierce upon one side of a cigarette picture, upon the other a printed précis of his prowess. Rupert wanted to write poetry, Jack, of course, would have to be a farmer, Fitzacher wanted to be a University don, and the Golding brothers spoke very earnestly about founding a banking house. They only smiled when the others jeered. Bony coveted a niche in the Ornithological Section of the Natural History Museum. And now, as Willie shuffled before the grave and gray-eyed scrutiny of his father, the ghost of these idle lunch-hour conversations came before him sadly. Suddenly he realised that he liked school. He did not want change : he wanted the same friends and the same fields, the same sun-painted yellowhammer singing on the fence, the same devious brook with its sparkle and ripple and little song, and the loach under the stones.

" Well, there is no immediate hurry for a decision, Willie. In a month or so your cousin will be here, and you can talk it over with him. You're a funny boy, and I confess that I cannot understand you. But think it over, about the future, I mean. Come, let us discuss things as man to man ! Willie, old chap, don't look on me as a jailer ! It may appear unpleasant to you now, the idea of earning a living, but I should be a poor sort of parent if I did not try to help my own son. Why, if I allowed you to do as you want to at present, where would you be at the age of five-and-twenty ! A pubcrawler or a tout for a person like Isaacs, or one of those unfortunate scamps who stare into the windows of porkpie-shops in London. Why,

you would grow up to curse me, if I did not see that you were trained. Wouldn't you ? ”

“ No, Father.”

“ Yes, you would ! Wouldn't you ? ”

“ Yes, Father.”

“ I am glad you take a sensible view of the matter. Personally, I think that Australia would delight you.”

Willie felt easier towards his father, and said dejectedly,—

“ There are rabbits out there, I know, and I could have a gun and take my birds' eggs for a memory, couldn't I, Father ? ”

Mr. Maddison sighed.

“ Even now, at your age, you can't get away from birds' eggs ! What sort of a world would it be, peopled entirely by men who were insane over birds' eggs. Heavens, my boy, you are hopeless. Well, I can at least do my duty, even if my father didn't help me. Yes, you may go, if you want to.”

Willie was red in the face, and tears would not be held back. He muttered something about homework, and crept out of the room, and up the stairs to his retreat. Listlessly he glanced at his books, fingering the favourite ones. *Bevis : the Story of a Boy*, the most wonderful book in the world, with its companions, *Wild Life in a Southern County*, *Dick o' the Fens*, *Twice Lost*, *Our Bird Friends*, *Coral Island*, *Lorna Doone*, *She*, *Nada the Lily*, and a sad and beautiful story called *A Tale of Two Cities*. They were old friends. He would take them with him, also his catapult. When the red sunset was in the evening sky he would wander over the ranch, potting at rabbits, while overhead a vulture would be waiting for him to die. There was his fishing rod in the corner, with its loose top-joint ; it would help to make Australia bearable. In one drawer was a ragged and small bundle of letters, much cherished, from Elsie who was in Belgium and never wrote to him nowadays. As he looked over them he discovered that by some curious mischance a letter Mary Ogilvie had written to him had not been destroyed. It was a year old, and her writing was an awful scrawl. He had never answered it. Taking it from the envelope he read it casually.

Dear Willie,—I thought I would write you a letter, and hope that you are well. I've just bin bathing in the sea, with a bloke called Howard who's a frend of mine. He's eating an orange. It is nice here by the marshes. The other day a lovely white seagull was knocked over by a wave, and broke its wing. I tryd to mend it, but it died. Well, I don't know what else to say. I think you was pretty kind to speak so nice to me last summer. Elsie often writes about you. I do think she is beautiful. I must close now with kind regards. Howard likes you. Excuse this boring scrawl.

Yours ever,

Mary.

P.S.—I do think you are kind to be so nice to that funny little ragged boy who lives in the little wood, Billneye. And I like the owls too.

Outside the window the wind stirred in the pear-tree like a dirge for the dead days of that fugitive summer. Willie tore up the letter and threw the pieces into the darkness ; the wind whirled a fragment back again. He picked it up and saw that it bore the tail end of the letter : *Yours ever, Mary.*

"I don't want her for a friend," he thought, "and who the devil is Howard?" He lingered over Elsie's letters to him, received far back in the dead past. After a while he emptied his satchel with distaste and tried to learn the first three Propositions in the Sixth Book of Euclid. Followed other dreariness, which soon he abandoned for a glance into *Bevis : the Story of a Boy*. This made him sad, and he turned to his secret Diary and tried to write in it. Two sentences he wrote, then closed it with a sigh, and went down to supper in the kitchen with Biddy. But even a large slice of her special pasty did not dispel the hopelessness that loomed up in the dreaded future.

November dreared into December, a month of sombrous mornings and darkness at half-past four when the bell sounded the termination of the day's work at Colham School. Willie realised how near was the Senior Cambridge Local Examination, and began to work with an earnestness

that puzzled his father. Every night he pored over his books, but the intricacies of Euclid, Algebra, Trigonometry, and other subjects were beyond his following. So he abandoned his general study, and confined himself to the *Acts of the Apostles, Chapters I.-XV*. During the final week he learned every speech, every context, read every note, and even went so far as to make an abstract of the most important chapter upon his bright new yellow ruler for a crib. He discussed with Jack the advisability of using this in the Divinity paper, but eventually decided to break it up. This he did, and experienced a virtuous glow, which was increased when he discovered that his labour had resulted in a perfect conning of the chapter in question.

Saturday morning arrived, spent by the senior boys in arranging the desks in Hall for the Examination that would begin on the Monday. Mr. Rore seemed to dispose of his horrisonous voice and serbonian glare, and to be a kindly, earnest human being. He called together the candidates for both the Junior and the Senior Examinations, and exhorted them on no account to do any work during the week-end. He advised them to take strenuous exercise, to go to bed early, and not to eat too heavy a dinner on Sunday. To popularise each of his points he, with perfect fairness, called for a show of hands either approving or dissenting, and seemed gently pleased when every boy ostentatiously agreed with his policy.

But that Saturday afternoon and evening every boy shut himself away in pursuit of mental power. Willie had tea with Jack, and afterwards both seemed restless; and Jack seemed positively pleased when Willie urged that he must return to swot up the *Acts of the Apostles, Chapters I.-XV*. Willie explained that he was going to try to win the Bullnote Memorial Exhibition, a prize awarded to the boy who in the Senior Examination headed the Divinity List.

"Father, please don't muck me," implored Willie at half-past two on that Sunday morning, when Mr. Maddison came into his room clad in a shabby blue dressing gown, decrepit slippers, and the white end of his nightshirt showing his thin legs.

"You should have worked before," complained his father

querulously, "it's no good, this eleventh hour effort. Besides, you might set the house on fire, with that candle propped upon your pillow."

"I'll be careful, Father," replied his pallid son.

"I don't care what you say, for I at least have a little sense. Besides, I can't sleep with your hollow mutterings echoing down the passage. Come, put the light out like a good boy, and have your sleep."

Willie sighed, and stared tragically through the dark window; then dropped the book on the chair. "Good-night, Father," he said despairfully.

"Good-night," conceded Mr. Maddison, closing the door behind him.

Willie blew at the nodulous candle, and lay back on the cold pillow. Yellow sparks danced before his eyes. He felt himself to be a heroic figure, studying in the silent midnight. He touched his cheeks to discover any cavities or shrinking since his great labour. The wick fumed to slow extinction and yielded in its lone red smouldering a grayish smell that howsoever he waved the air clung to his nostrils. For hours it seemed he turned in his bed, phantasms passing before his mental gaze. Below in the hall the grandfather clock whirled in preparation for striking, then three decaying clangs filled the old house. Willie repeated parts of speeches in the intervals of praying for a revelation in his sleep of the Divinity questions. He must bring home the Bullnote Memorial Prize, which was valued at three guineas, and whose winner was allowed to choose any number of books, provided that the total value did not exceed sixty-three shillings. Why, he could have sixty-three of the Everyman Library, with the Presentation Plate in each one, and all signed by Mr. Rore. He must get the Bullnote Memorial Prize. Then the continent of Australia, coloured pink on the map and like a crushed crabshell, insisted its claim before that of the sixty-three volumes in the Everyman Library. The pink crabshell sank into the sea, and sheep began an enforced leaping over a five-barred gate. The fourth sheep could not jump, and all his will power could not prevent its front legs from banging into the third bar.

The pear tree tapped against the window sill, somewhere in the wall a mouse was gnawing. He wondered if it had a store of nuts, then turned over on his other side, wondered if a Voice ever spoke to people as it had to Saul on his way to Damascus, then sleep fell upon him.

High was the weak silver sun in the eastern casement when he awoke feeling sore-eyed and unrefreshed. Biddy was coming with a cup of tea. She sat down on the bed, and held it out to him, but he neither spoke nor moved.

"Come on, midea," she coaxed, "it be hot and sweet enough for ee."

"Don't want any tea, Biddy," he grumbled, then sat up, remembering about his work. "I say, has Father said anything more to you about Australia? He hasn't to me. When I told Jack he said the idea was absurd. Yes, I think I will have the tea, thank you. I'm sorry I was so grumpy, only I was swotting rather late last night with the Acts of the Apostles, for the Bullnote Memorial, you know. Do you mind hearing some more of my speeches? Here's the book, and don't help me if I stumble. I'll remember all right."

To Biddy's satisfaction and his own elation the various speeches came easily to him.

"I'll get the Bullnote Memorial, Biddy, you see if I don't! Aunt Sally and Swann are my chief rivals. I don't think much of Aunt Sally, but Swann is rather a dab at Scripture. Golding said he would ask his father, who is editor of the *Colham and District Times*, to put the results in the paper. I shan't tell Father, but he'll read it there, perhaps with my photo. Golding would only promise to ask about the photo if I gave him my cap-badge, as he said he was collecting old silver, et cetera, for a hobby. I believe he sells them at the popshop, but anyhow a cap-badge isn't much good, and I can pinch another chap's. And talking about Colham, who do you think Jack and me saw there yesterday? We chased a saucy kid down an alley by the waterside, and John Fry the chapel preacher was there, absolutely drunk. He looked awful, white about the face and black under the eyes."

"Aiy, aiy," nodded Biddy sagely. "Ah knows um.

Never did hold wi' um, or wi' chapel. Bant no gude, be Jan Fry, a whited sepulchre, reckons. Courting that there Dolly at Mis'r Lewis, so ah've heard tell-on. She bant no gude."

"She's all right," urged Willie. "I can never understand why you don't like Dolly. I think that she is awfully decent. I shall never forget how ripping she was to me when I ran away when I was a kid. Oh, Biddy, if only you had seen her, kneeling by the fire. She was a dear. She held me when I banged my head on the crowstarving rail. Biddy, I wish you would like her. I swear she is all right. And so is Tom Sorrell at the quairey. I reckon he's in love with her, but she is waiting for Jim to come back."

"Ers gone for gude, I reckons," remarked the plump housekeeper, patting her hair, screwed tightly over her little round head.

"'Fraid so," lamented Willie, feeling a moistness in his eyes, "but just see how faithful Dolly is."

"Ah, you be too young, midear, to know things praaper."

"Pouff, I know as much as anybody. Why, there isn't much to learn about life and love. When you love anybody, you want to be with them all the time, that's all it is," exclaimed Willie, triumphant at his discovery.

"Tew true," endorsed Biddy, regarding her boot.

They were silent with their deep thoughts, and Willie sipped his tea.

"No, I'm not such a stupid," he went on, "and I can see which way the wind is blowing."

"There be never a smoke wi'out a fire, as ay tell ee."

"Quite right, Biddy. Tom Sorrell now, is quite a nice chap, and he lives all alone in the quairey—quarry, I mean. He hates John Fry like poison, and no wonder, because John Fry is in love with Dolly."

"Er used to make soft cyne at him," snorted Biddy, "Er be a loose un."

"If she's a loose un, Biddy, why hasn't she married some one else?" cried Willie in triumph.

"'Cause no one'll wed her."

"How about old George Davidson and old Tom Sorrell

then? Oh, Biddy, I don't think you know much about love and faithfulness. I think that once you love, you love for ever"—he was thinking of Elsie—"and if they die, or don't love you, well, you hold their memory sacred all your life. Oh, Biddy, why do you always sneer at Dolly, and all the nicest people that have ever been in Rookhurst. You don't like Bill Nye, do you?"

"Grawbey," she sniffed.

"Elsie?"

"Er's not gude enough for ee."

"Mary?"

"Now her be a praper lill maid, wi'a loving heart, midear!"

"You didn't like Jim Holloman."

"Er were like un of his own mazed oddmedodds!"

"Do you know, Biddy," the boy said, looking at her earnestly, "I believe that Jim was a mystic? You know what a mystic is, don't you?"

"Aiy, course I does."

"What is it then?"

"Fancy that, now! Axing what be a—a—un of ee!"

"What is it then?" he jeered.

"I knows as weel as ee knows."

"Aiy, aiy," he mocked. Biddy seemed to swell indignantly.

"A mystic," went on Willie, "now I've never told you all about that night I did a bunk. In the morning, just as dawn was breaking, Jim woke me up and we went to the edge of the spinney and he just pointed at the sky, said no more. I felt funny, Biddy——"

"Er mother were a witch, so Granfa Will'um did say."

"Rot. Listen to me. Jim never spoke. His eyes were dreamy as he watched the big white star over the woods. Then afterwards he told me that every morning something woke him and he went to watch the dawn. Now, since I've been reading the Acts"—he pointed to the book and Biddy, a devout churchgoer, nodded approval—"I've been thinking about Saint Paul. He was a mystic. He knew things that other men didn't, he simply knew. Why shouldn't Jim be a mystic, too? Can't you see my point of view, Biddy?"

he exclaimed, eyes bright with the thought. "Jim didn't know he was a mystic. Dolly told me once that sometimes when she used to walk with him at night Jim used to be as though from another world."

Biddy shook her head.

"You'm tew fanciful, Mas' Willie. You shouldn't argue on the Bible."

"You don't understand," he urged.

And shaking her head, the old woman went out of the room.

All that week Vc sat at spaced desks in Hall while the great gas ring above burned its hundred jets, while the rain beat on the high roof, and the Visiting Examiners lolled at the green baize table on the platform, or wearying of this, strolled slowly up and down the aisles, passing boys scratching out answers on unlimited paper. Sometimes the door of the Sixth Form room would open silently and the pink face of Mr. Rore, with its white moustache, gaze intently at the candidates. It was a time of tranquillity for him, after the anxieties of the first day. All the masters had an air of sympathetic calm. Even Mr. Rattlethrough's voice never penetrated the gloom made more abysmal by the flittering gaslight. Behind locked door the junior forms gathered silent and undisturbed; upon the piano rested a light dust; a film of rust spread in patches over the gratings usually burnished by the passing of a thousand leather soles.

On Thursday morning at half-past eleven o'clock Willie sat with a haggard look at his desk, conscious that he had done badly so far. One of the Visiting Examiners for the Cambridge Local Examination, a tall thin man in a black gown, with the appearance and deliberate movements of a stag-beetle, handed out copy after copy of the pale blue question-papers. After an unbearable meander, it seemed, the beetle-eyed Visiting Examiner dropped a paper on his desk: with a trembling hand and sickening heart he clawed it: glanced quickly at the questions: found that they were practically unanswerable, consisting of unheard of queries and speeches: and nearly wept.

He peered round the Hall, and saw that most of the boys

had taken up pens. Swann and Slater were writing eagerly. Effish had rolled his paper into the form of a tube, and was blowing at a dying fly that crawled upon his desk. He winked at Willie, and shrugged his shoulders, then coughed wheezily.

Two hours were allowed for the Divinity exam, and one quarter of the time had passed before the first question was answered. Repeatedly he turned to note the time, feeling as though some one were boring with a gimlet into the base of his spine. Other thoughts kept rising, clouding the narrative of the Acts of the Apostles. Whenever he glanced at Swann and Slater they were writing easily, the one with pursed lips, and the other with wavering tongue.

"Oh, God help me," prayed Willie, "let me remember what Stephen said after—*Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Madian, where he begat two sons.* But no inspiration arrived, only a repetition of a foolish doggerel schoolboy rhyme that paralysed all memory as a spider with his poisoned fangs deadens the struggles of a fly. *And the Lord said unto Moses, all ye shall wear long noses, all except Aaron, and he shall have a square 'un.* This grotesque blasphemy obtruded itself so insistently that Willie found himself to be writing it upon the paper.

He groaned, and flung his pen on the desk. The more he endeavoured to recall the speech of Stephen, the bigger grew the vision of Moses with an enormous nose examining that of Aaron which was square like a gigantic sugar box. The sixty-three volumes in the Everyman Library mockingly ranged themselves neatly before him. He thought of Biddy sitting by his bedside a few days before; he thought of his father with gaunt feet loosely within bulgy slippers, of his white nightgown and straggling beard: it was at this part of the speech of Stephen that he had come in, and interfered. In despair he left what he had written and went on with the next question, an easy one, quickly answered, about the context of certain quotations. Now he was writing speedily, unheeding the passage of time and Slater with his tongue vibrating as he bent over the paper. To question after question he replied. As confidence returned so memory clarified.

With a sigh of satisfaction it was ended, just as the Senior Visiting Examiner, rising wearily from a rickety chair near the piano, droned that five more minutes would be allowed. Willie felt that except for the first question he had done well: but the Bullnote Memorial Prize he deemed to be lost. Lunch that day was a riotous meal, for by some curious omission no master was on duty. Immediately the Specials became rowdy, first flicking bread pills at one another, then little pieces of crust. Samuel Crinkle endeavoured by minatory yelps to subdue their high-spirits, but even his repeated writing of names in a grubby notebook failed to interrupt the fun. Soon bread pills were inadequate as missiles, and a new phase in the table-war was entered when Bony flung, with great accuracy, a baked potato and hit a curly-haired boy named Sheppard in the eye. Sheppard, usually quiet and lazy, projected with a big spoon a slice of beef that wrapped itself round the right ear of Slater, amid roars of laughter and cheering. In the great fun Willie forgot to bemoan his ill-fortune, and thought that as meat was being used by the outcast Specials, he might as well bombard one of them with a handful of sprouts. He did so, and the tureen after the sprouts, with a cry of Carrambo. His prowess was cheered, and so was the volleying of two inkwells by Effish. The porter retired with Mrs. Duffe and the two alarmed serving maids; a number of junior boys, attracted by the unusual noise, came into Hall and watched raptly the sport of the mighty. When Crinkle returned a minute later, with "Marmalade" Tom the pale pantry-boy, determined to clear Hall, every one was wrestling with some one else, while a small group had detached itself and was struggling for the larger portion of a tablecloth. The Golding twins had taken their plates and knives and a large dish of baked potatoes to the green-baize table, where they were seated, eating and watching the fun. Macarthy was endeavouring to remove with two forks a pat of flaked rice pudding that congealed his fair hair; shards of plate were everywhere, the wood flooring greasy and littered with bread and broken potatoes; a Special named Farthing was poking knives and forks down a grating, and

another was busily tearing down the stale sheets of *The Illustrated London News*, *The Graphic*, and *The Sphere*. The porter seized the nearest boy, who happened to be Jack. He released his arm as a bombardment of scraps was directed upon him. One or two boys ran out of the door, the rest hesitated, then rushed in a laughing body to the playground, falling over little fleeing boys who with shrill dismay were everywhere trodden upon as they blocked the passage.

The seventy boys, now thoroughly terrified, who had lunched in Hall were paraded at two o'clock before the Head Master. Samuel Crinkle selected random boys as the ringleaders, usually those whose furtive eyes could not help but meet his shifty gaze.

"A very disgraceful exhibition," remarked Mr. Rore, lancing terror at them under his semi-circular glasses, "very bad indeed. I understand, Temperley, that you hurled a segment of jam tart at Dr. Bullnote's portrait, and also at the clock. Is that so, sah? And you, Effish, cast ink about?"

"Me, Sir?"

"Yes, sah, you. Do not equivocate. I shall gie you that cane! As for you, Farthing, I shall consider your removal. Your crime showed a vicious temperament. Maddison, of course, is chiefly involved? Well, sah?"

Willie looked on the ground.

"As usual, sah, you have nothing to say. I shall gie you that cane! Bryers, I am sorry to see you here. And Swann too. And you, Manning! I thought I could trust you, and you, Lucas, and you, Fitzacher. Bad, bad. But it is the reaction, I suppose. Just so. Still, there should be moderation employed everywhere. I can quite understand your high-spirits. You are boys who work, who throughout the year are hard-at-it, hard-at-it! It must not occur again. Your promise, boys?"

They murmured that it would not occur again.

"Very well," he cried sharply, turning to the lined boys. "This must not occur again. The reaction must take place on the football field. What boys agree?"

Every one agreed.

"Ah, yes. I am glad you concur. It is a period of

strain, I know. But control yourselves, boys, control yourselves ! Learn control ! To-night all boys must run five miles, and no sugar in tea for a week ? What boys agree ? ”

Again the ready hands were displayed. Mr. Rore nodded.

“ I shall say no more about it. This afternoon is Trigonometry and Latin. Your fates will be decided, the tares separated from the wheat. The damage must be shared by all. What boys agree ? ”

All except the Golding twins eagerly assented, but in the general agreement they were unnoticed. Mr. Rore dismissed them ; and lead the miserable trio into his study ; while in the playground both the Goldings complained of the unfairness.

“ Well, it won’t be more than a tanner,” scoffed Hoys.

“ It’s the principle of the thing,” they exclaimed earnestly.

“ Yes,” replied the quick-witted Clemow. “ But usually it’s not the principal, but the interest. If you want to buy a vatch, buy a vatch : but if you don’t, take your nose away from the window. Yah, ikey, who pinched the spuds, eh ? ”

They took the chaffing good-naturedly, seeing, as always, no reason why energy should be wasted in even heeding the inevitable taunts. In reality they were popular with every one, for although they were ever the gainers in a swop, they had never been known to do an unsporting or an unfair action.

Three amazed boys rejoined the rabble in the playground and told their friends that Mr. Rore, when they had entered his study, had dismissed them abruptly, advising them not to be so foolish in future. That evening Willie wished that he had been able to answer more questions in the Trigonometry and Latin papers ; of the former, indeed, he had only replied to one, and that with a hazarded guess ; Mr. Rore’s unexpected humanity induced a vague remorse for past slacking.

The Cambridge Local Examinations ended on the Friday afternoon, and Mr. Rore announced that those candidates who were feeling the mental strain need not attend at school the following morning. Everybody must have undergone a

strenuous time, since no one appeared except the Goldings, who, helping to shift the desks into various class-rooms, managed to secure between them one hundred and seventeen unused nibs, nineteen pencils (four being the super-valuable Koh-i-noor), thirty-nine penholders, seventeen rulers, and over thirteen ounces of mixed sweets and chocolates; then these ablative youths went home.

On Monday Vc did no work. It knew with the instinct of a class forcedly unscrupulous that howsoever Mr. Rore iterated to Mr. Croodbrane or Mr. Beach or Mr. Kenneth the need for constant application—lest the dreaded weeds of indolence might grow—he would accept without question any plea of lassitude or head-weariness. Vc did no work in school hours, and none at home. The unfortunates in Va and the Sixth, having the privilege of Mr. Rore's personal instruction, had to work in school, and do a certain amount of preparation. Vc did not "go to" the Head Master for any subject. During the three days preceding that curious rite, surviving apparently from dark ages, and known as "lantern lectures," Vc ragged Old Useless and was sneered and thundered at by Ratpoison, endured the merciless wit of Taffy, and enjoyed itself under the laxity of Bunny and Old Scratch. Ratpoison, indeed, was, at this end of the term, sometimes quite charming. On one occasion he actually passed forty minutes out of forty-five without once loosing off a thunderbolted epithet or even shouting. Nor did he show any desire to keep the nose of Vc down to the grindstone. He conversed pleasantly with various boys, his forget-me-not eyes twinkling delightfully as he fingered his moustache. Only twice did he vibrate his right leg. He astonished Vc on the Wednesday afternoon by giving, quite unofficially, a verbal examination in general knowledge, which Vc enjoyed keenly.

Mr. Rattlethrough, leaning back in his chair, gazed at the ceiling, two hands in his pockets, jingling a bunch of keys and some brown coins.

"Tell me—er—Watson," his modulated voice inquired, "tell me, or rather, inform all of us, since we are in quest of knowledge . . . er . . . ephemeral knowledge . . . tell

us what you would do if you, if you had a pin stuck . . . er . . . in a bicycle tyre, of course, not . . . huh-huh-huh . . . in your head ! ”

Vc ha-ha'd, and Bony, not daring to reply boldly that he would slosh the chap who did it, answered :

“ I should take off the tyre, Sir, with the levers, or failing levers, I should use spoons, Sir——”

“ Good, Watson, good.”

“ Then, Sir, I should carefully remove the inner tube, Sir——”

“ How, pray, Watson ? ”

“ By taking it out, Sir.”

“ Correct, Watson. *Continuez, s'il vous plait !* ”

“ Yes, Sir. Then I should get a bowl of water, Sir, blow up the tube, Sir, and detect the puncture by a stream of air bubbles, Sir——”

“ Excellent, Watson, excellent. Effish, what next ? ”

Effish distended his nostrils, slid his tongue round his cheeks, and stared at the floor.

“ You have no such means of locomotion, perhaps, Effish ? ”

“ No, Sir.”

“ Ah, well. Perhaps it is a blessin' in disguise, Effish. You might, in a moment of abstraction, get run over, and that would be . . . er . . . an undisguised blessin', what ? Huh-huh-huh-huh.”

Vc echoed his mirth.

“ *Dites-moi, Effish, s'il vous plait, que voudriez vous . . . er . . . what you would like to be on leavin' . . . er . . . Colham School. A dustman, an engine driver, or one of the other conventional professions that are so dear to the infantile . . . er . . . childhood.* ”

“ No, Sir.”

“ What then, Effish ? Come, do not be shy.”

He waited, with twinkling blue eyes, that nevertheless held a hint of frost. Effish saw one drooping end of his moustache being licked by his tongue ; at any moment it might be sucked into his mouth ; and chewed ; and then——

Mr. Rattlethrough's right knee moved, up and down, twice.

"I should like to be a schoolmaster, Sir.

"Don't be that Effish. You might have a class like Vc to deal with. Huh-huh-huh."

The crisis was passed.

Jack put up his right hand.

"Well, my boy, well? inquired the French master.

"If you please, Sir, may I ask *you* a question."

The class gasped. Mr. Rattlethrough stared, then smiled.

"Certainly, Temperley. *Continuez, mon ami, continuez*, rash youth!"

Jack produced his satchel, and took from it a bunch of weeds.

"What—" began Mr. Rattlethrough, seizing one end of his moustache.

Jack went towards him, and bashfully held out the handful.

"I found this, Sir, and can't identify it. That is one question." He started to giggle with excitement, and Mr. Rattlethrough appeared to be enjoying himself immensely. "The other, Sir, is what does the flower smell of?"

"Good heavens, Temperley is cracked!" said Mr. Rattlethrough, and everyone yelled. "However, let me smell. Er, yes, Most peculiar. Let every boy smell it. Pass it round. Most extraordinary! Let every boy write his answer on a piece of paper."

Which was done, after excessive noise. Every boy guessed the smell correctly, but only Bryers wrote the name of the plant, which was Hound's-tongue, smelling of mice.

"Most interestin'," said Mr. Rattlethrough, "but now let us continue. Er . . .

"Er . . . Cerr-Nore. Ah, *oui*, Cerr-Nore. *Dites-moi*, Cerr-Nore, the author of *Le roi des Montaignes*."

"Dumas, Sir."

"Quite right. Clemow, tell me, who was . . . er . . . Chaucer, and what is he distinguished for?"

"*Canterbury Tales*, Sir, and the *Taboodin*."

"*Tabard Inn*, Clemow. It has a heraldic derivation. Er . . . Macarthy, what notorious poet has died within the last few years?"

"Keats, Sir."

"Recently, I said, Macarthy. Keats died in the sixteenth century. You ought to know more about our great Elizabethans. Try again."

Macarthy mused.

"Bryers?"

"Swinburne, Sir."

"Splendid. And what did he write that was so beautiful and inspiring?"

"May I reply critically, Sir?"

"Certainly, *mon enfant, mais oui!*"

"Then nothing, Sir."

"What, Bryers? Do you think that his . . . er . . . outpourings were . . . er . . . unbeautiful?"

"All except one or two, Sir. He was just a jingle of words, Sir. A barrel-organ poet, Sir, mostly."

"I see you have the critical faculty of using the carving-knife! Hur-hur. However, nothing approaches Shakespeare, or even Matthew Arnold. Let me see now, Fitzacher, what is there so remarkable about salmon fishin'—the great salmon industries of Aus—of the world?"

Fitzacher made a pitiful effort to think. Mr. Rattlethrough chuckled, and explained.

"They eat what they can, and can what they can't."

Vc was silent.

"Huh-huh-huh," laughed the master, with Effish, whose mirth was a daring imitation of Mr. Rattlethrough's.

"Explain, Effish, explain to these thick pates!"

Effish, with an empty laugh, said that it was so silly.

"Why, Effish?"

"They cannot can what they cannot, Sir, even if they are cannibals, can they, Sir, huh-huh-huh?"

"What?"

"They eat while they may, for to-morrow we die," explained Effish quickly, fearing an outburst.

He was not mistaken. Mr. Rattlethrough glared rabidly.

"Are you trying to be impertinent, Effish?" he thundered.

"Stand out there, long-eared Ass! Bottle-eyed BABOON!! Face the wall. You are an ingrate, sir. Yes, an ingrate.

Never before have I met such an unruly lot of hooligans. Maddison, I've told you before, I won't have this sniffin'! Coughin' and sniffin', mornin' and evenin'! Stand out there, snivellin' snipe! Very well then, as you all take advantage of a little freedom, we will resume. Page, page! *A qui est le tour?*"

"*C'est a moi, mersewer,*" squeaked an undersized boy with a pixie-like face and a faint voice name Power, who was nicknamed the Musical Mosquito.

"CONTINUEZ, *s'il vous plait.* Ah, there's the bell. Go away, Vc. Leave me, you ingrates. Yes, go away. Return to your muttons of idleness. Watson, you starin' fool, don't grin at me. Just look at our bony friend!"

Vc, straggling out, shouted with glee at this unexpected remark, and Mr. Rattlethrough, as unexpectedly humoured, twinkled at them with his eyes of forget-me-not blue as he hung his gown upon its accustomed hook.

The lantern lecture was given on the last afternoon of the term. Somewhere from his tunnelled recesses Samuel Crinkle brought forth a creased sheet with ropes and a dozen boys managed to fix it almost diagonally against the wall behind the platform. While this was being done another dozen boys, under the direction of a high-voiced, button-eyed junior master, removed the dais; they dropped it as often as possible, trying to break it. Mr. Ellison cracked his fingers, and hopped nervously, while he shouted many confused directions. A swarm of other workers arranged the desks in Hall, while the lackadaisical Specials stood around and ate nuts, and held torn green copies of Pitman's *Shorthand*, and stuck fallow pens behind hair-fringed ears. Another gang, under the direction of Mr. Waugh of the Chemical Laboratory, a master with a curious way of pronouncing the language, because he was born and educated in Manchester, dragged two heavy cylinders containing oxygen and hydrogen and some pipes into Hall. Importantly Mr. Croodbrane unlocked one of the glass cases adjoining the Physics Room, and fifty or sixty boys endeavoured to be selected for the honour of carrying the magic-lantern to its table just under the horizontal bar.

"Hard at it, hard at it," urged Mr. Rore to the senior boys who sat in the sulphuretted atmosphere of Va. "Every moment is vaaru-ble. Get that mental paar, boys. There is still another five minutes. Don't let me see your eyes, Fortescue. Foxy, sir, foxy! Sport is not everything. Hard at it, boys, hard at it."

He stepped from the room and closed the door; with a mammoth sigh Va and the Sixth abandoned their problems of Projectiles until a warning step on the loose grating outside (a boy of a past generation had effected this ingenuity one lunch-hour) rebowed their heads over the desks.

When the bell sounded nearly every master yelled out that there was no need for such a noise. Doors opened and gobbled eager classes into Hall. The quiet and little boys of the Second and Third Forms sat meekly in the front rows, where during the illustrated lecture by Mr. Donkin, who was reputed to be a "big bug in Whitehall" and the only Old Colhamean with the exception of the renegade empire-builder to have distinguished himself, they enjoyed the blurred pictures as thoroughly as their position permitted. After much shuffling and confusion of shouted commands, in which it was thought by Willie that Mr. Worley—a very youthful master with a moustache that gave the impression that two small house-flies were stationary on his upper lip—and Mr. Rattlethrough were shouting against one another, the entire school was seated in Hall.

"Now portah," commanded Mr. Rore, and while every one sucked in breath appreciatively the yellow gas jets high overhead died to blue points in a circle: the oxy-hydrogen lamp hissed: a white glow radiated from the lantern: "all right, Croodbrane, I can manage by myself, thank you," came acropically from Mr. Waugh: the school tittered: a daring boy named Farthing whistled suddenly: the school tittered again: the same boy catawauled softly: "quiet—there," warned Mr. Rattlethrough: a curiously coloured travel-picture was thrown upside-down on the wind-blown sheet: and the gentle voice of Mr. Donkin began to explain the wonders of Tea Growing in Ceylon for all the world like an advertisement in an effete magazine. The lecture went

on while the Specials, who all day long had been announcing their joy at leaving that evening, flicked chewed pieces of paper at boys and masters and blew dried peas through a tin tube indiscriminately. Farthing managed to hit Mr. Rore in the ear, who quietly summoned Crinkle and ordered him at a given signal to turn the gas-cock full on. This was done, and Farthing was detected by Sammy Crinkle who tried to drag him from his seat. Farthing shared the universal dislike of Crinkle, and gave him a black eye. Mr. Rore sternly ordered him to go home, and with a miserable attempt at a swagger the red-faced Farthing got his overcoat and walked away, turning round to quaver "So long, you fellows," but no one dared to answer. In an awed silence he clattered over the tiles of Little Hall, past the model steamship, and so out into the night unfriended.

In spite of the hot-water pipes, the packed boys, and the unventilated Hall, a chill seemed to have struck at the heart of the school. After a brief and almost undetectable tremulant in tone the voice of the lecturer flowed on gently as before, and with an inadequate stick he pointed at various landmarks. The cylinders were not equal to their work, and towards the end of the lecture the limelight grew feeble, and every other slide, it seemed, was either cracked or chipped. A hum rose in Hall, and no voice was raised to check it. The address came to a rowdy conclusion when, through carelessness, apparently, the magnified reproduction of a curious family group was thrown on the sheet and as hurriedly obliterated by a flurried Mr. Waugh. Mr. Crood-brane, to quell the disorder, thumped out the opening bars of the National Anthem, and after the singing every junior master yelled, "Sit still, you boys." Mr. Rore mounted the platform and spoke briefly of the sempiternal debt that every boy owed to Mr. Donkin and his set of coloured slides. That distinguished Old Boy was given three hearty cheers, and in reply he said that it was so great a pleasure for him to return to scenes of his boyhood that to say anything further was unnecessary. He hoped that all on leaving would join the Old Colhamean Club, for five shillings per annum, and that was all that he had to say: he had always been a poor

speaker, he feared. For twenty minutes he emphasised this, and told them that he would keep them no longer, then got down amid more cheers, and every master yelled "Don't move till you get the order, boys." Some one in the Specials requested "Three cheers for Moneybags," meaning the expelled Farthing—to which a few replied with faint-hearted bravado. "Proceed," called Mr. Rore, and the classes scampered, uncontrollable, to form-rooms, where amid unnecessary lid-slamming and unchecked noise the boys routed for caps and gloves and satchels. Then into Hall they rushed, to pause a moment with the important Specials who were showering their farewells upon big and small alike; but for some reason they did not look as happy, Willie mentioned to Jack, as they should have done. In fact he thought they looked almost miserable as they shook hands with a smiling and effusive Ratpoison, and Taffy magnificently friendly.

THE POOR RELATION

Two days after the end of term Willie went with Jack to meet the town cousin who was arriving at the Halt by the three o'clock "moter." A soft moist rain fell from a dull sky, and as the friends walked up and down the short platform, hands placed for warmth within mackintosh-coat pockets, they spoke pessimistically about the mild weather and of Phillip.

"From what I can recollect of the chap," affirmed Willie, "he is rather barred. It's only a faulty impression that I had, of course, and in all probability he is much worse by now. He went to a board school, you know, so I expect his manners are pretty awful. Still, I don't suppose that any of the fellows in Vc will see me with him. Oh, lord, we've got another ten minutes to wait. He's sleeping in my room. I didn't want him, but Father said that all the other rooms were damp. I wish that you were coming instead. Still, you will come over every day, won't you?"

"Oh, rather. I say, old man, don't you think that our

friendship is a fine one, eh? Don't laugh, but I reckon we are like David and Jonathan. Mother said so the other day."

"Jack, we must never end our friendship. Personally, I don't see how it can be ended. You and me are not like other fellows, are we? Somehow, they do not appear to be idealistic, do they?"

"You've hit it, Willie. The other day I was reading a book by a chap called H. G. Wells, called *Tono Bungay*. Shall I lend it you?"

"Sounds like an Italiano-icereamo book."

"Don't laugh, Willie," urged his friend, "but it was full of idealism and flying machines. From it I learned what you and me are. I am a 'perfervid artistic appreciator.'"

"Whatever is that?"

"Oh, I looked it up in the dictionary and it means those who have an intense understanding and regard for everything connected with art. Now you are a 'perfervid artistic creator.'"

"You talk like the gipsy at the Rookhurst Revel last summer. You're not ragging?"

"No, really I'm not. I'll give you the book. As a matter of fact, I've been trying to invent a medicine like the one in the book so that you and me can make our fortunes. I've got a fine plan."

"But what's that you said I was?"

"An artistic creator? One who creates any work of art. That's it, because you're writing a book, aren't you—your Official Diary of Observations, I mean. Hallo, here's Rupert!"

A small thin boy had waved his hand, and started to run over the wet platform towards them.

"Hallo, Willie," he smiled, his cheeks faintly rosy like those of a girl. "Hallo, Jack. I've just had lunch and tea with old Ratpoison. He is awfully decent to me. Are you chaps going away?"

"No," replied Willie. "We're just waiting for a rotten cousin of mine from London who is staying at my house for the hols. How's Bony?"

"Fine, thank you, Willie. I say, I saw old Moneybags yesterday, and he isn't expelled after all. After school he

went back and said that he was sorry he hit porter, but it was the last day. The Bird said, 'Wi' you apologise to Portah, Farthing, for rendering nigrescent the lower portion of Portah's socket?' 'Yes, Sir,' said Moneybags, 'for your sake, Sir.' 'What do you mean, boy?' asked the Bird, and Moneybags said, 'May I speak out, Sir?' 'Yes Farthing, you may,' said the Bird. 'Well, Sir,' said Moneybags, 'when I was going down the hill I suddenly realised that you were right about work, and so I determined to come back and tell you, even if I was expelled.' 'You are a senior boy,' said the Bird, 'and the junior boys must always have an ideal. *As astra per aspera.*' It's a fact, Willie, so old Moneybags told me! 'Yes, the responsibility of a senior is very great, Farthing. Also you should not strike an inferior. Also, my brother lost an eye through a pea, which, if it hits the pupil, which some people call the apple, is considerably destructive. A cricket ball, Farthing is infinitely preferable!' Then Moneybags said that the Bird sent for Creeping Sammy and asked for a cricket ball. 'I thought he was going to give me a wallop in the optic with it,' said Moneybags, but when he returned the Bird placed it in Moneybags' eye and said, 'You understand now, I hope. The socket saves the pupil. It will be a lesson to you, Farthing. Do you agree?'

"Moneybags held up his hand, and the Bird nodded. 'Portah,' he said, 'Mr. Farthing will apologise.' 'I apologise, porter,' said Moneybags. 'Werry good, Farthing,' grumbled Sammy. 'Ah, Portah,' corrected the Bird, 'ah, he is now Mistah Farthing.' 'Yes, Sir,' said Sammy, and went out.

"The Old Man gave Moneybags a single whack, and then told him that he was not expelled. 'I hoped that you would return to apologise,' he said. 'I am glad, very. *What should be, shall be!* Remember that all your days, Farthing. Influence your fellows!' Then he rang the bell and said, 'Ah, Portah, bring two cups of tea.' When they came, he offered Moneybags a fag, and Moneybags said he was so nervous that he spilled all his tea over the carpet, and down his weskit, and couldn't light the fag. He half-expected it to go off bang, but it didn't, and as soon as he could he hopped

it, having swallowed half the fag. He was sick outside, but puts it down to some jollop he swears Sammy put in his cup for revenge ! ”

To this account Willie and Jack listened with amazement. Such an act on the part of Mr. Rore was not understandable.

“ I reckon the Old Man is all right,” Willie informed the two.

“ Oh, rather,” they agreed.

Rupert told them that his partner Bony was building a museum for objects of natural history, geology, and curios. In fact, he said, he must be away immediately, as he had promised his help that afternoon in digging the large hole in the garden from which the museum, with sides and bottom duly cemented, and covered with glass, would as years went on expand till Colham Town Council adopted it as its own and made Bony its curator.

“ Good-bye, you chaps,” smiled Rupert. “ Merry Christmas,” and having thanked them for their returned wishes, he went away.

“ Can’t old Rupert be funny when he wants to ? ” said Jack.

“ Not half,” replied Willie, ‘, he’s a brainy bloke, is Rupey. Hallo, there’s Timmy Tanglilegs ! He looks like Useless, doesn’t he ? Let’s buy a paper, and see if my letter protesting against compulsory education has been printed.”

A small and miserable-looking man carrying a canvas bag big with newspapers was slouching down the platform. He was reputed to be lazy by the inhabitants of Rookhurst as well as mazed. The labour of carrying his enormous canvas bag upon his left shoulder had given his body a curve, and as he walked his loosely-jointed thin legs, enwrapped with baggy trousers, seemed alternately to tangle together and untangle themselves. His boots were worn to the uppers, for he trod on his heels ; the coat he wore reached his knees, and upon his head, concealing his right ear by its peak and all his forehead by its unstitched lining, was a greasy check cap. Timmy Tanglilegs bought up week-old copies of *The Colham and District Times*, and a rival paper called *The Colham Gazetteer and Morning Clarion* (each paper was the

leading journal of the county and had the "largest" circulation) selling them in outlying villages at half-price. He had a straggling black moustache growing from a hollowed face holding eyes dark and woeful; and every day he walked about twenty-five miles. In addition to selling smudgy papers he traded in rabbit skins, with which his pockets usually bulged, and he was reported on one occasion to have been discovered in the act of eating one.

Willie bought a paper, but could not find any evidence of his letter having been published. He felt rather unhappy, because he had told all Vc to look out for it; he had signed the letter *One who rattles through life with fifteen children*. A great joke, since Mr. Rattlethrough was rumoured to have fifteen offspring.

"Look, they're closing the gates," remarked Jack.

A red-faced porter was swinging the white barriers athwart the level-crossing; the stationmaster peered from a wooden shanty looking like a tool-house, but bearing the legend, OFFICE—PRIVATE upon its door; far away against gray clouds a frail white rag of steam was flapped by the wind. With a clanking the "moter" puffed itself to a sizzling stand-still; the old bearded driver spat reflectively, a fat old woman with many paper parcels was helped out of the carriage by the stationmaster, two old men and a girl followed, then Willie saw some one in a bowler hat who was apparently Cousin Phillip.

The two walked up, hands in pockets, and perceived a tall youth with a thin pale face trying to descend with a botched bag of black leather in one hand and a fishing rod in the other. Seeing them he smiled quickly and disregarding the awkward step jumped to the platform, which was two feet below the "moter." The fishing rod caught in the vertical handrail as he leapt, shooting the black bag from his hand and casting him in a heap upon the wet boards. His bowler hat rolled over and over, and the black bag yawning suddenly debouched collars, handkerchiefs, and half its other contents.

Willie and Jack picked him up, but he clutched his right knee.

"Are you hurt?" inquired Willie anxiously.

"It'll be all right in a seck," moaned the other in a soft voice. "It's these beastly boots."

He looked at Willie with eyes of a blue intensified by black hair and a pale skin made pink by the pain that caused him to press together his lips.

"It's all right," he called out to a boy who was salving the jetsam of the black leather bag. "Don't trouble, thanks very much. I'll do it in a moment. Yes, curse the dam boots," fiercely to his cousin.

Willie looked at them, and wondered if every one in London wore such extraordinary boots. They were long, and fastened with loose buttons, with patent-leather toecaps cracked and split, and around his cousin's thin legs was a space of at least half an inch, so that it appeared as though the smallest shake would cause them to drop off in walking. Phillip saw him looking and went pinker.

The stationmaster, forgetting his hat, came out of OFFICE—PRIVATE and asked if he could be of service, and every one on the platform stood round, staring. Timmy Tanglilegs retrieved a dinted bowler hat, for which Phillip to the great impressment of the onlookers gave him a shilling. Soon he announced that his knee was better, and stood upright.

"Oh, this is my friend Jack, Phillip."

Phillip smiled and shook Jack's hand, although an urchin was endeavouring to thrust the bag into it.

"Bad luck about your fall," sympathised Jack, while Willie frowned at the circle of silent onlookers.

"It's all right now, thanks very much," Phillip announced, but no one moved.

"Would you like a cab?" suggested Willie, hoping that his cousin would refuse, since he had but a halfpenny in his pocket.

"Oh, no, thanks very much," said Phillip, knuckling the dents from his bowler hat. Three barefooted boys rushed away to secure one.

"Your hat has left a ring of mud round your forehead," Willie pointed out, after Phillip had carefully put the hat on

his head. "But that's a detail. Well, let's come on. You take Jack's arm, and I'll carry the rod and bag."

Sympathetically the little gathering moved with them; the fat old woman in her excitement getting wedged in the pass-gate. The stationmaster retired for his braided hat and returned. Waving aside unofficial endeavour, he pushed her, while she emitted groaning sighs and a scrawny young woman repeatedly snapped "Come on, Mom, do!" At last the pass-gate was free, and the stationmaster swaggered off to OFFICE—PRIVATE.

"No, we don't want a cab," said Willie to a battered individual who was waving a scaley whip in their direction. Phillip's hurt was not so insistent, and he was now able to walk without the fancied aid of Jack's arm. He made no further reference to his boots. Willie wondered why he wore them, if he were so shamed at them.

"I say, it is fine to be in the country," said an enthusiastic Phillip, gazing at the line of downs over which a low cloud was dragging. "By Jove, that's a hoody crow. You don't often see them about where I live. I say, do you live in a road, Willie?"

He spoke with shy nervousness, which puzzled his cousin.

"No," replied Willie. "You'll soon see the house. We can go in the back way, across the fields, or by the lane, whichever you like."

"I think I should prefer the fields, thanks very much."

"It'll be rather muddy, I expect," suggested Jack.

Phillip frowned at his boots, as though he would like to kick them into the hedge. "The dam things are pretty split, what?" he almost apologised.

"How's Auntie and Uncle?" asked Willie, suddenly remembering that he ought to have inquired before.

"Oh, all right, thanks very much. Mother—Mater—sent her love to you. She remembers you as a kid, and said you must come up and stay with us sometime. Only, of course"—hesitatingly—"it isn't quite so decent as this."

They passed cottages before which children played around puddles, floating matchsticks for boats, and all pausing to stare as the three trudged past. A watery sun washed

the broken clouds with wan silver, and raindrops shaken from the bare branches of the elms splashed upon their heads and shoulders. Willie looked at Phillip from time to time, and thought how drawn were his cheeks, how deeply blue were his serious eyes, how palely delicate was his profile. Now and again Phillip glanced with uncertain timidity at his cousin, the knowledge of which gave to Willie a sense of easy superiority and therefore kindness. He wasn't such a bad fellow, after all, he thought. Suddenly Phillip burst out :

"Father wants me to go to Australia next year. He said that you were going. If you go, I shall have to !"

It occurred to a joyous Willie that his cousin was a decent fellow.

"No, Phillip," he replied, "I don't want to, and what's more, I shan't."

"I have left school," said a gloomy Phillip, kicking a stone with his boot, and hurting his foot.

"I thought——" began Willie.

Phillip turned his head quickly, then looked on the ground.

"Oh, our fellows leave about seventeen," he explained hurriedly, "although it isn't a public school like Colham. There's two books about it in the Lewisham Public Library, and it was founded in the seventeenth century."

Willie wondered how his cousin had managed to realise his unspoken thought. He had imagined that Phillip went to a free school, like the one in Rookhurst, where under one master and two female assistants children up to the age of fourteen years were heard to be hum-hum-humming whenever one passed by its ugly stonework.

"Do you think we shall be able to go shooting?" cried Phillip, who had been looking all around with eager eyes.

"Oh, yes, rather," said Jack.

"How spiffing, man! And is there any fishing, do you think?"

"There's some pike in the lake, and perch——"

"Perch?"

"Hundreds, and roach. We want a little frost, and they'll bite like fun."

"Oh, how lovely. Oh, Willie, I am so glad I came. I say, you chaps, don't mind me butting in, do you? I mean to say, I've got a friend at home, and understand, you know."

"No, of course not, Phillip," rejoined Willie, liking him more every minute. "Jack and me are glad to have you. Honest, though, I didn't know you were so decent. When you spoke about that crow it showed you were all right, didn't it, Jack?"

"Oh, rather!"

"You must join the Owl Club, Phillip. It's very select. There's no subscription"—Phillip looked relieved—"but it's only for special chaps like Bony—he's a chap at school—Rupert Bryers—he's another, good poet, too—and, in fact, all decent chaps, you know. We are going to meet once every year in a linney and pour out a libation to the gods, as the Bird would say. Will you join?"

"Rather—I mean, thanks very much, Willie. You are jolly decent to me."

"Oh, rot."

"Oh, but you are," said Phillip, looking at him with earnest eyes, blue as a cornflower.

Jack said good-bye to them at a fork in the road. "You chaps will come over s'evening won't you?" he urged quickly, lest in his voice should appear a wistful anxiety about Willie's need of his company now that Phillip had turned out to be such a decent fellow.

"Of course we will. After supper. Shan't we, Phillip?"

"Not half!"

"Good-bye, then," and he turned away.

"Good-bye, old boy," they answered.

Biddy opened the door to them graciously. She was overjoyed at the thought of company for Willie.

"Hallo," said Mr. Maddison, dropping *The Morning Post* and jumping up when they went in to him. "How do you do, Phillip? Tired after your long journey? Well, the next thing is food. And how are your father and mother?"

"Very well, thanks very much," stammered Phillip, nervously trying to conceal his boots. "Father sent the goo-goo-good wishes of the season to you, and thanks you so much for having me, Sir."

"I'm glad to have you, my boy," heartily replied his Uncle John. Willie felt embarrassed and almost wished that his father were not so genial. "Now, Willie, take Phillip upstairs. A meal will be ready in ten minutes."

Upstairs Phillip sat down on his bed and removed his boots, thrusting them far out of sight. He wore a black coat and waistcoat, with striped trousers. From his bag he pulled a tweed coat, shook it, and hung it behind the door. Then he slipped on a pair of old black dancing pumps, obviously too big for him.

"Do you think Uncle John would mind me having sup—lun—er—dinner in this coat?" he almost gasped.

"No, of course not," replied a mystified Willie. "I say, you're pretty swagger. I wear this old coat when I can. Look, it's got a poacher's pocket."

"Then I can wear mine!"

"Of course. Why ever not?"

With a sigh Phillip cast the black coat on the bed and put on the tweed one.

"Do you think your pater would mind me calling him Uncle?" he asked.

"No, of course not!"

"He's awfully decent, isn't he?"

"Oh, not so sooty," condescended Willie.

"I think he's fine. I wish my father and yours would see each other a bit. Father doesn't know anybody in London. This is a lovely place, Willie. I wish I lived here, instead of having to go into the Moon Fire Office after the vac."

"Father said something about me going there too."

"Oh, did he? That's jolly, isn't it?"

Willie did not answer, and Phillip's spirit was depressed.

It was a happy supper party. Willie noticed how his father seemed to like Phillip, and how Phillip, who had appeared terrified lest he took soup with the wrong spoon,

soon changed and became quite witty. Biddy almost danced into the room with the various dishes.

"Don't be late if you can help it," said Mr. Maddison after coffee, when with coats donned and caps held in hands, the two boys were standing on the mat under the soft shine of the hall lamp. They assured him that they would not, opened the door to face a blower of cold wind, and went out into darkness. They linked arms as they trudged down the road. Phillip frequently cried out that it was ripping, and every time Willie surged with happiness at the other's joy. On either side of them a black hedge loomed, and sometimes a star glimmered through vaporous space above.

At Skirr Farm they were welcomed hilariously. Peggy, a golden-haired girl of fifteen, became shy-eyed when she saw Phillip, and for the rest of the evening her gaze was covertly for him whenever she imagined herself to be unregarded. Doris, a serious little maid of thirteen, crouched by her mother's side, listening eagerly to the talk of the great Willie and this grown-up stranger. A fire of split oak-logs burned in the open hearth, throwing its gleams upon the polished barrel of the old blunderbuss secure on nails along a beam overhead. Phillip told them of the trams that were spoiling the country at his home, and how the elms had been thrown along the road to a Kentish town called Bromley; of the field behind his house where once he had actually seen a pair of kestrel hawks soaring. He told them, in a hushed voice, of a certain place called Piccadilly, all glittering with lights at night, where he had been on two occasions; of the wonderful play his father had taken them to two years ago that Christmas. But, he affirmed, it was not a quarter so good as Rookhurst.

After a while their voices were silent, and they stared into the fire-splitten logs, tranced with the flutter of gold and red, the hovering and dying of blue and green flames hued like a phantom peacock's tail. Christmas Eve was two days away, the fire was warm, the long shadows held a mystery. Phillip realised that for a little while his dream of such a life had come true, then a pain came into his heart as he thought of his mother at home, of her sweet face patient

for them all. Now that he was away from her he felt remorse at the unkind things he had, and so often, said to her. In the fire he saw her face, and heard her brave hope, so oft repeated through the year, that one day she would have a cottage in the country. Himself was now happy in the country, he would be shooting like a sportsman, every night he would eat dinner, not a scrambled supper in the kitchen : his mother at that moment was probably sitting in a chair while Father read his paper or sat silent, staring into the fire.

Phillip turned his head, enthralled with this wonderful farm-house, with its diamonded windows, and ovens let into the thick wall on each side of the hearth, and granfer-clock reflecting dully the flamelight on its tarnished face. Perhaps highwaymen had used that blunderbuss, with the gleam of fire on its barrel. He sighed, and saw in the ruddy darkness the face of Peggy, regarding him with eyes large and wondering in the shadow.

The little servant-wench came in with a tray of cake and cocoa ; quickly it seemed the scalding cups were cooled and it was time to leave ; the first evening was ended. Bright were the stars as they walked to the roadway arm in arm. The broad constellation of Orion with its studded belt and trailing sword lay in the south, and there too was flashing Sirius the Dogstar ; a half-moon was golden above them. They both declared that they glimpsed the sweeping wings of a heron that crarked across the wintry sky, flying for the mere. Willie told Phillip of Heron's Plume Island and their hut, and the big battle that one day would be fought against Clemow and Hoys.

Mysterious was the night as they lay in bed seeing each other dimly. Across the carpet crept the white moon-maiden, and the shadow of the pear tree moved towards the eastern window with her. Listening in the intervals of their whispered confidences Phillip could hear the whistle of curlews passing to the moors. Willie told him of Jim Holloman, and he shivered with excitement, asking to be shown the spinney where actually the romantic figure had lived, and where even now a crowstarver was sleeping beside a fire with mice

searching among the leaves, and perhaps wild-fowl flying overhead.

"I used to have a sort of army, you know," the voice of Phillip whispered. "We were called the Bloodhounds. Our call was a deep bay, and we had a hut in the old brick-field behind the house, called the Backfield. Only father always forbade us to go there, but when he was in the city we used to go. By Jove, we used to have some fun. There was a rival gang called the Foxes, and they used to raid us, and chuck clay-bullets. Mother used to let us have our dinner out there during the holidays, and fry bacon, and bake spuds in the embers. Oh, it was ripping. Of course, it's all over now. My friend Robert isn't very keen on it any more, and I feel rotten when I go down there alone or in the woods at Beckenham or Bromley or Westerham."

"I reckon that you and me are exactly alike," decided Willie after a long pause; "we're both fond of nature. I—I like you, Phillip."

"So do I you," breathed the other.

"Do you like Jack?" asked Willie, almost eagerly.

"Oh, yes, rather. No wonder you and he are such good friends," and Willie felt that he almost loved his cousin.

The white moon-maiden entangled in the thicket of shadows stole nearer the casement through which the dawn, seeking to dispel her sadness with his fervours, would peer too late. More drowsy grew the talk of the boys, more infrequent their exchange of loved recollections: and to the rue of the wind in the chimney they sank into slumber.

The next morning all three tramped up to the spinney, and found Bill Nye carving a piece of wood with an old knife. Sheepishly he hid it when they appeared, and then stared at Phillip, who regarded him as though he could not understand how a boy of his age managed to live all alone and feed himself. Bill Nye was so undersized, indeed, that to a stranger he appeared no older than seven or eight years. His bare feet were muddy and his head like a malkin—the bundle of wetted rags on a stick with which the cottagers used to clear dust and ashes from their baking ovens. Willie gave him an old pair of trousers for a Yuletide present, which

the boy, grinning with delight, at once pulled over those that he was wearing.

"Thank ee, Mis'r Will'um. Gude uns thay be, thank ee!"

On the following day Mr. Maddison went into Colham, after telling Willie at breakfast that on Christmas afternoon all at Skirr Farm were coming to tea. His son was astounded. Again Phillip confided to Willie that he thought his uncle was a ripping chap. Willie, immediately assuming the mantle of responsibility, invited Jack to lunch, and the trio sat down in the dining-room, at one o'clock. "Would you care for a sherry and bitters?" asked Willie of Phillip.

"Oh, no thank you!" replied his cousin, alarm in his blue eyes, which changed to merriment the next moment.

"I don't believe we've got any in the house," confessed the other, "but in the paper novels that Biddy reads, the villain, Sir Robert Ffoulkes, always asks his guest to have a sherry and bitters, and then with a saturnine smile he extracts poison from his ring and does the bloke in."

Phillip laughed, and then replied politely that he liked ginger wine, and raisin wine, but best of all, cider.

After the meal they raced upstairs to Willie's bedroom. Phillip was shown once more the collection of birds' eggs. Among the rarer eggs Willie and Jack had collected were those of the big Buzzard, or Coneyclitch, found in an enormous eyrie up a fir tree in Northside Wood: the Kingfisher or Halcyon, whose white shiny eggs were pink when unblown: the Heron or Mollern, a wading bird that nested in tree-top colonies like the rooks: the Merlin Falcon: the Greater Spotted Woodpecker or Tom-tap-all-the-afternoon: the Golden Crowned Knight, or Golden Crackey, the smallest British bird: the Long-eared Owl or Devil-horned Jinny Oolert: the Evejar or Skep-swallow, so called by the countrymen on account of its fondness for bees: and the Red-backed Shrike or Hedge-Grawbey, which name was awarded for its habit of stealing fledgling birds from their nests and impaling them upon a long thorn, for a larder. These treasures were gazed at fondly until a new attraction was offered by Willie on his hands and knees peeling back the carpet.

"Why, I made a trap-door like that," exclaimed Phillip,

"when I was a kid. I wanted to make a tunnel from my room, into the cellar, and under the garden into the Back-field, only I knocked a lot of plaster down into the sitting-room. I tried to fill the hole up with cement. I don't think that Father's seen it yet, or there would have been a row. Father's got a fine air-gun, and used to hide it in a cupboard, but I found it and once broke two hundred wine bottles in Grandfather's garden, which is next to ours. His house-keeper sneaked, and I was taken to the police-station, and warned ! "

"What a mouldy thing for your father to do ! " remarked Willie, immediately feeling uncomfortable when Phillip's cheeks grew red and he said lamely,—

"Well I broke my promise in using the gun."

Willie pondered on the change in his own parent when on Christmas morning he and Phillip were each presented with a saloon gun, and a box of No. 2 bulleted breech-cap cartridges. Phillip's joy was great, and his gratitude hesitant with emotion. Shamedly he declared to his cousin that he had no present to offer his uncle, or indeed to any one, as he had only brought a shilling with him ; but his misery went when Willie explained that his father would only have been angry, as he refused all birthday and Christmas gifts.

"I'm so glad that I gave Bill Nye those trousers," said Willie, "for he has given me a carved wooden rabbit. Do look at it, just like a savage totem ! Let's hop over and see him this afternoon before the others come, and also old Bob Lewis, shall we ? "

They went to the cottage in the pine wood first, and knocked at the back door. It was opened by Dolly : her face lightened when she saw them. Willie introduced Phillip who wondered whether to shake hands or not, the same embarrassment being felt by the woman. He made several false starts, finally letting his arm fall by his side and bowing stiffly, blushing.

"How is Bob, Dolly ? " asked Willie.

"He be asleep along wi' Gramma." She pointed to the closed door of the parlour.

"Aren't you cold all by yourself out here in the kitchen ? "

"Noo, midea. Th'ould people want to rest awhile. Hark ee now, can ee hear anything?"

They listened. Dolly looked at the blue eyes of Phillip, for the vision of Jim would not fade from her mind, and something in the dreaminess of the boy's gaze was curiously akin to the look of the absent one: a spirit too sensitive, ever shrinking as though conscious of its own imperfection and weakness, called forth protective tenderness from her loving heart. Phillip looked on the stone floor, nervously tapping the toe of his left shoe with his right foot. Dolly smiled, and his timidity passed with the instinctive knowing of kindness; in a soft voice she whispered,

"Can ee ahear anything?"

"What is it?" asked Willie.

She beckoned them forward, pausing beside a heap of potato sacks in the small shed connected by an open door with the kitchen.

"Why, it's Bill Nye," exclaimed Phillip.

Willie said eagerly:

"Has he had dinner here, Dolly?"

Dolly nodded, and pointed to a litter of goose bones on the stone floor, surrounding a white plate licked clean.

"Young limb, what do ee think he did now?"

They looked puzzled.

"He took a bottle o' Gramma's turnip wine, and drunk eeself mazed"

"Carrambo!"

A faint snore came from the curled bundle on the potato sacks. Willie shook his shoulder, but he did not wake. Hair hid his pointed ears. His attitude was so comical that Phillip started to laugh.

"Well, if Bob's asleep, I won't wake him," decided Willie, already eager to get back to see Jack. "What are you doing s'afternoon, Dolly?"

She did not answer immediately, then told him that Tom Sorrell might be strolling round for a cup of tea.

"And John Fry?"

Her face changed. "Ess, but us doan't want un. Us

hates t'sight on he. Gramma now, her thinks un nice chap to wed." She spat on the floor.

THE ANCIENT RITES OF THE CORN SPIRIT

PLOUGH MONDAY was celebrated in the village in the third week of the new year, and Phillip on his last afternoon was able to see the strange procession. This rite had been held in Rookhurst, so Granmer Nye told him, ever since the walls of the first cottage had been raised from a mixture of straw, cowdung, lime, and stones. The corn being winter-sown, the last furrow usually was ploughed about the middle of January. For weeks after Christmas the patient teams of oxen plodded round the big wheatfield drawing the twin shares with their curved gleam of silver. White and agile gulls flighted from far coastal regions, joining the flocks of rooks, daws, crows, and stares. Behind the patient beasts they screamed and wheeled, the gulls graceful and soaring, alighting with gray pinions upheld on a glistening furrow suddenly to seize a worm or a beetle-case; the rooks jostling and flapping sable wings, the stares chittering and running with eagerness. Sweet chirrupings in the wake of the turmoil were made by the pied dishwashers, some of them winter visitants with slender breasts of daffodil, and all joying in the lavish gift of the ploughman guiding his team straining at the swingles.

Bill Nye the crowstarver and Samuel Caw his mate, a still smaller boy, realised their importance when the berries had been cast fanwise from the hand of Big Will'um—grains of faint gold, holding the hopes of all who toiled in the fields. The clappers sounded from the first light with the clang of the rail and the beating of tins and sometimes the hollow voices of authority floating to the desolate oddmedodds. Young rooks grew white-faced like their elders with the labour of digging into the earth. Some were shot and hung sweeing in the wind, unheeded by their greedy brethren. Now they took their tithe of the seed, since all the year they sought the wireworms and the chafergrubs that in

their dark galleries and winding tunnels destroyed the rootlets.

Rookhurst rejoiced on Plough Monday. It was a half holiday, and all made merry. Even the crowstarvers left their turfed hut and clappers, and joined the revellers. They dressed Bill Nye and his mate in the skins of asses, and harnessed them to the wooden plough, a relic of olden time, that would ensure fruitfulness. Big Will'um the bailiff, tall and gaunt and heavy-booted, guided the barefooted pair. He himself took long loose strides; a boyhood in the heavy winter fields, dragging feet from the sticky clods, had given him a slouch. Every aged cottager, clad in best clothes, hobbled to his doorway to see the revel. "Whoa, naw," growled Big Will'um. The pair pattered to a standstill, then wheeled several times before the cottage, drawing the plough after them. The old people beamed, and dreuled their gratitude when the sacred corn-spirit had given its blessing—now the garden, soon to be sown with potatoes, cabbages, beans, onions, a lettuce or two, and a stick of rhubarb in the sun-warmed corner, would produce a fine yield, and the pig not get fever, but fatten well and perhaps reach "dwenty-voor zgore." From cottage to cottage they passed, making as to furrow the ground before each one. Through Rookhurst they went. George Davidson carried a blown-up pig's bladder on the end of a stick, with which he belaboured grinning labourers and the padding donkeys alike. Ribbons were wound round his body, and a red paper cap was on his head. About a hundred children, men and women, followed the procession, accompanied by dogs of all sizes and breeds. Every one was happy. Bill Nye had never felt so proud before, enwrapped as he was in the ass's skin. He knew that a big good meal was at the end of it, and, with luck, a quart of Goliath XXX.

Willie felt proud that this was his village, so impressed was Phillip, who declared that he had never heard of such a glorious idea before. Neither Jack nor his cousin was able to tell him why the asses' skins were always used by the boys who drew the lucky plough. "It's only done in this village, having died out elsewhere," informed Jack.

"It's an old custom too," remarked Willie. "At least six hundred years old." In reality it was a survival of the rites of the corn-spirit practised since the first thought of man was to put the idea of a god into stone and food. Likewise at the harvest—to eat the firstfruits was to have within the body the power of the corn; a survival, possibly, of instinct combined with early human reasoning: the practice of eating the conquered and, therefore, possessing his strength and his cunning.

Everywhere they visited, even the hollowed chalk quarry, leading off the roadway and screened by bushes, where Tom Sorrell was sitting and smoking before his tin-roofed cottage. Two of the kilns were dead; from the circular rim of the other a misty vapour arose. He stood up as they came along the cart-track, wiped his pipe on his corduroy trousers, dusty-white with the lime, and leaned against his doorway. The two asses drew the wooden plough three times across the threshstone, while Tom Sorrell nodded to George Davidson, who blinked and tossed his nose in recognition. "Could do wi' a quart," he said. Tom scanned the people who thronged the quarry, looking from face to face.

"When's price o' lime a-cumin' down, Tom?" some one asked.

Tom shook his head. "Ax Varmer Turney. Nobbut do wi' us."

"This is the place," Willie told his cousin, "where Jim and I came that night. See those blocks of chalk above the edge of the kiln? We lay next to those, on the leeward side, so that no poisonous gas came across."

"I say, it's a wonder you weren't choked in your sleep."

"The chalk sunk right down in the night, but I dared not look over. Yes, that's the kiln, and from that day Jim has not been heard of or seen."

Phillip stared at the circular stone rim.

"Look," he cried, pointing.

Over the burning kiln hovered a lonely flame, a flame of pale fire, rising high above the fumes unfretted by the chilly wind of dusk. Like a spear-thistle upright and golden it shone: shrinking even as they watched, fading like a dream frail and mystic passing into nothingness.

SHADOW AND SUNLIGHT

*"It grows, ah, yes, it grows! How does it grow?
Builds itself up somehow of sugar and starch, and turns
mud into bright colour and dead earth into food for bees,
and someday perhaps for you, and knows when to shut
its petals, and how to construct the brown seeds to float
with the wind. . . ."*

RICHARD JEFFERIES.

THE VILLAINS

COUSIN PHILLIP went home after Christmas, having made himself most popular at all three houses. Willie and Jack went back to school and ragged about more than ever. February came, and one morning on their way to the Halt they met Bill Nye and his friend Samuel Caw, a black-eyed boy with jet hair sticking straight up on a head that with its long solemn brown face resembled a parsnip. These two had with them a bitch-puppy of extraordinary appearance. One of this dog's parents had been a whippet, and the other the spider-faced prick-eared Dutch shipperke owned by Mrs. Cerr-Nore. One night this creature had bitten a hole in the rotten wood of the door of the shed where the whippet had been tied up, howling. The resultant litter was a surprise to George Davidson, and so obviously a disaster that he had drowned all except the one necessary to keep the mother in health. The miserable puppy, with its thin narrow head and large hazel eyes, long arched body, thick legs and fox-like tail, having been discarded during its fourth month of life, had wandered across the wheatfield in a semi-instinctive search for some one who would love and beat it. Hearing Bill Nye's voice, it had crept through the trees with downcast head and trailing tail. The crowstarver thought to heave a brick at it, but nothing heavy enough was at hand. Meanwhile the puppy, its belly almost dragging on the earth, approached near, and wagged its absurd tail. Bill Nye sat still, and it came closer, finally coming to him and licking his ankle. Thus assured of its utter humility, Bill Nye thwacked it with a stick, while the puppy wailed in despair. He told it to stop its hollering, which it did, at the same time lying on its back and holding erect its thick legs. Bill Nye tossed it a rabbit's head, the puppy bared its teeth in a happy leer, and the friendship began.

At night the creature crept into the shelter and slept rapturously against the skinny ribs of its adored master. Bill Nye had never had anything before to love him. He had been an unwanted baby, pale of face and little of body. The child-mother who had borne him had turned common market drotchel and died young in Colham. She had asked to see the boy just before her death in the dreaded Grubber—as they called the Union or Workhouse in the town—but her grandmother had refused to allow the child of sin to see her lest he might be tainted even more. The child-heart was sealed. The village children, with the exception of Samuel Caw, another base-born child, had not played with him, and the bigger boys had jeered at him and kicked him on all occasions. But Bill Nye did not care. He had plenty of things to interest him. There were little birds in spring to be caught and teased, their feathers to be pulled out. There were dozens of eggs to be taken, and naked baby birds to be strung on a thorn, and fish to be hooked; in autumn apples to be stolen and always lies to be told to the school-master. Granmer, to be sure, whipped him and put soap in his eyes, and locked him up every Sunday morning in a shed with the Bible open before him, but that was nothing; in the shed were flies to be caught and stuck on a pin, and regularly he spat into her milk-jugs and put dirt into the lardy puddings she made.

Dolly was good to him, but nothing in him cared for her except his stomach. Jim Holloman had sometimes allowed him to sit by his fire, but of him he had been scairt, because he was mazed and a witchbast. Willie he admired in his distorted way, but Jack he feared and avoided. No one cared for Bill Nye—the King of the Oddmedodds, they called him. His affections were writhen like one of the pollard beeches in the spinney that the winds and frosts of early spring upsweeping and drear had blasted immaturely. But since the puppy, who answered to the name of Tiger, had attached itself, the sap of humanity had been rising in that poor stunted little nature.

Bill Nye and Samuel Caw touched forelocks to them, and Tiger wriggled its belly in the grass in gratitude for the

stroke. Samuel Caw was by profession a swineherd, and in the autumn he would lead his drove into the beechen woods for the brown mast that crunched under the foot. He wore a pair of greenish boots too big for his feet by six inches, and the sole of the left one had fallen away and flapped as he walked, or rather shuffled. The boys were going to set springes of horsehair for moorhens that ran about in the watermeadows.

Willie and Jack passed down the road. They would be in ample time for the "moter." Willie suggested a walk in the withy beds by the brook, to see the wildfowl ; it would be but a slightly longer way to the Halt.

The wands were ruddy and yellow, and the ground squelched under their feet. Snipe and the smaller winter migrant, the mothflitsie, jerked up from their feeding almost at their feet, and sped away in zigzag flight. Excitement was caused by a large marsh owl with pensile and feathery talons wafted by sedge-yellow wings from its roost in a patch of flowering-rush. They looked for a nest, although they knew nothing would be there save perhaps a dead mouse or a cast pellet of bones and fur. A family of longtailed tilmice flitted among the wands, wheezing to themselves as they hung downwards in their restless search for insects. As they went from tree to tree the gray wings made a tiny drumming, and their long tails rustled on the moist still air of winter. The leaves of the early celandine were among the grasses, shaped on their curved stems like hafted delving spades. Lowly they were, but Willie noticed them. Then in a hedgerow he found a dandelion, sickly and small, but it received a loving thought—though a weed, it had wrought its heart hastily in the shape of the sun, perhaps because its feelings had been so strong.

Leaving the withy fields and the wimpling brook they had to go through a patch of waste land in order to reach the roadway. Scattered ashpoles reared starkly from the trodden wilderness of bramble undergrowth ; black circular patches and charred sticks showed where tramps had made their fires during past wanderings. The waste land bordered the roadway for about a hundred yards. A big man was

crouching behind a chestnut-stole, holding something in his hand, and unmoving. They saw that it was John Fry.

Warily they crept forward, trying to avoid stepping upon any twigs that would give warning of their stealthy approach.

Innumerable thistle heads of autumn bleached and downy pricked through their socks. Finches perching on the ash-poles called one to another, and sweet notes came from a clearing in front of the watching man. More flocks joined the twittering specks above, with them about a dozen red and black bullfinches arrived, piping their call-notes. Willie wondered that John Fry should take any notice of their whispered winter melody. Or perhaps he was watching some one invisible to themselves. He forgot about the "moter." Jack looked at him: he too was alertly curious. Then the man pulled something, leapt up, and ran forward. He took with him a small square box, it seemed.

"He's catching birds," whispered Willie.

"Let's watch," urged Jack.

John Fry returned, holding birds in his hand, and the cage in the other. He set down the cage, then sat on a log and fumbled at the hem of his coat; bent slightly forward.

They watched, mystified. Came a cry, a scream pitiful and despairing. Another and another, each feebler than the last; the man took up the cage and thrust the pair through the wired doorway. Jack tried to hold Willie, but the other broke away, and ran forward. John Fry turned round, his eyes with their sandy lashes colourless and hard, and showing hate.

"Wh—what are you doing with them?" cried the boy, feeling that his throat was nearly closed.

"What be that to do with you?"

"You were torturing them, you cruel nasty brute!"

John Fry scowled, his wide nostrils opened and he moved his lips over his teeth.

"Be off, 'fore I scatt ee," he growled.

The finches in the treetops were still talking among themselves, and answering the decoy birds tied to string below. A flutter sounded from the cages on the ground, a ceaseless beating of wings as the finches thickly huddled tried

to escape. The crimson feathers around the beaks of the goldfinches were dulled with sinister bedrugglement, where the blood had stuck them together in their continual thrusting of beaks through the cage. Little brown linnets hung to the wires and again and again strove with beating wings to be free. In his right hand the man held a large pin. Willie stooped and peered into the cage on the ground, then stared at Jack, unable to speak. His eyes filled with tears that would not cease. For in the fearful glance he had seen that the chaffinches in the cage were dishevelled and clawing one another, and in their empty sockets the bright red blood was smeared.

At the river pothouses of Colham they matched the cock birds in song, each trying to outsing the other, till the strongest survived and earned for its owner much money in bets. Certainly the birds sang more loudly in the dark ; so they blinded them ; and more frenzied was the invocation of the wild ones for the light that came never. . . .

A coarse hand with bitten nails dragged him to his feet. Jack swore and hurled himself at John Fry. The powerful man twisted him round and flung him spinning into a skeleton bramble bush. Willie felt a booming blow on the side of his head, and was conscious of his face squashed against a pricking thistle.

Jack got to his feet, and helped Willie up. He had never seen him in such a rage. He told John Fry that he would set Big Will'um to tear his head from his shoulders. Yes—backing away—Big Will'um would twist it and draw it out of his body with his bloody windpipe stretched like a bicycle tube. His father would hound him out of Rookhurst. They would go straight to the policeman's cottage about it. It was against the law—moving rather fast as John Fry seemed about to crash after them—and he was a white sepulchre, preacher, pah ! God would send him to hell, the great hulking pig-stinker-horse-cheating-bully. Wanted to marry Dolly, did he, and bullied Granmer Nye—

At this they hared away in alarm, for John Fry made a rush for them. But they were fleet, and fear gave them an added speed. He chased them as far as the roadway, then

returned to his clapnets and call-birds, while they yelled at him.

They just caught the "moter," and their adventure was repeated many times to the Cerr-Nores. In the High Street they met Bony and Rupert, and before nine o'clock every one in Upper School knew that Mad Willie and his friend had captured a whole band of poachers, stolen their guns and brought them to school (hidden in the lav., some whispered). Certainly Willie's scratched face, and bruise on the cheek, gave veracity to all the tales that were told.

Just before break Vb seemed to become, in spite of the nidorous atmosphere in the class-room, a vitalised and eager band of boys, where before it had been a soporific mass. For Mr. Rore suddenly entered the room where Mr. Crood-brane was mumbling about square roots and quadratic equations. Three bright-faced boys followed, bearing between them packages of white booklets. A sibilance went round the room.

"Now you shall know your fates," murmured the Head Master with grim cheerfulness, "pass them round. Only one each."

"The Cambridge, the Cambridge," hissed the boys, with trembling voices. They turned the pages, which seemed so flimsy and to stick together. Some one found the list of First Class Honours. With a dry throat and feeling as though he had swallowed some peppered ice, Willie waited. He felt unequal to looking. Every one seemed to be speaking.

"Good Heavens, both the Goldings have got a First!"

"Effish, you've a Third. Coo, old Bryers'z got four distinctions!"

"Fitzacher's got distinction in Maths, Trig, Stinks, German, French, Geometry, and English."

"Dove and Beckelt aren't in the list—they've failed. Crummy!"

"Where am I?" said Willie in a parched murmur.

"Here you are. Pass. With Bony, Temperley, Macarthy, and about twenty more. By Jove, Swann and Slater have got a 'd' in divinity. They'll probably share the Bullnote Memorial."

Mr. Rore was gazing intently at the various boys who seemed to him to typify humanity. There was Swann, tall and scholarly, with a curious manner of writing with his head first on one side then on the other, and with pursed lips. Symons, a clever, good boy. Fitzacher—the lad would go far.¹ Bryers, a distinctly charming fellow, of good stock. Slater, inclined to be easy-going, but earnest, earnest. Walton, a clever boy, with great natural abilities—but his nose should be kept to the grindstone. Beckelt—foxy, like Effish. Watson, a curious mixture: his mentality was too loose-fibred to permit of any intense concentration. Dove, a wild impulsive but generous idiot. Temperley, a dull boy, representative of mediocrity. Maddison—

“Ah, Maddison.”

“Yes, Sir,” replied a shaky voice.

“Come wi’ me to my study, wi’ you, when I leave? I have something of import to impart.”

(“Oh, what has he found out about me this time?” wondered Willie.)

“Now boys, the results are distinctly good—and distinctly bad. Swann, Golding major and minor, Lonsdale, Moffat, Manning, Lucas, excellent. Very. Yes. Distinctly. Some, however, are distinctly disappointing. Beckelt, for instance. Pauper spirit, sah. Papescent mentality, sah. Be sure your sins will find you out! In life you will go to the wall. Nature never forgives and never forgets. But trials are sent us to test our strength. *Ad astra per aspera!*”

“The great thing, boys, is this. Make the most of *now*. No fai’ure is entirely wasted if its significance is apprehended! What boys agree? All of you. Good. I am glad that you are wise. Now then. Hard at it, hard at it! To the fai’ures I say: Don’t let it happen again. The only thing of vaa’ue in this world is work. Work! *What should be, shall be!!* Master your difficulties. Tardily though may revolve the heavenly wheels, yet they grind minutely! As you are now, so you will be out in the world. The savage cannot benefit by experience. He is content—snug. He has not advanced because he is content to lie on his back in the sun

¹ The lad did, as most Old Colhameans remember.

all day and let ripe bananas drop into his mouth. Now I will leave you. Come, Maddison ! ”

While he had been speaking the boys were still. Mr. Croodbrane stood by his visible labours of chalk, square roots, and quadratic equations, with his tongue curled upwards in his mouth and a vacant dreaminess on his face. Then he closed his mouth and stared at the ceiling.

Willie followed the Head Master, walking swiftly with his pink shiny head held so high that he gave the follower the impression of floating over the wooden floor, past the brown desks where the Specials frowned over deep problems arising from debtor and creditor balances. Under the clock and the portrait in oils of the late Dr. Bullnote, D.D., Mr. Rore floated, his heels echoing on the tessellated floor of Little Hall. By the shiny glass of the model steamship, and so into the dread study with its little square of worn carpet, yellow wooden chairs, and window view of evergreens with the asphalted entrance beyond.

Mr. Rore sat down, and took up a large sheet of paper. His modulated voice urged to the terrified boy :

“ Ah, Maddison. Yes. The Divinity Exam. The Visiting Examiners have appended a note about your papers. Were you e ? ” His keen blue eyes froze Willie. Mr. Rore regarded the shifting gaze of the boy, his inability to meet his own eyes, and thought that he was dealing with a shallow, deceitful nature.

“ Is the boy mad ? ” his voice incised, like a diamond cutting into glass.

A tear rolled down the boy's face. For some extraordinary reason a phrase passed through the Head Master's head. *In vain he breasts the bars of brass*. In vain himself tried to stimulate the finest in the natures of his boys. The boy before him, a senior boy, was weeping. He had no moral backbone !

Mr. Rore went on, evenly and coldly :

“ I have been sent your Divinity Papers. The Examiners state that on the whole the paper is good—very good. However, in the first question there is a deliberate impertinence. Read that, sah ! ”

He handed Willie the first sheet of his paper. How strange it all looked, how long ago it was written. Then, underlined in red ink, he saw the awful rhyme—

And the Lord said unto Moses, All ye shall wear long noses : All except Aaron, and he shall have a square one.

“ Can you explain it, sah ? ”

Willie stared at the paper, horrified, appalled. Had he written it ? Certainly it was in his handwriting. He stared, unable to think or speak.

“ Come, sah, come. I am waiting.”

“ No, Sir.”

“ I shall have to consider seriously your removal. The other questions are answered with bri’ance. That is so curious. Your total marks, were it not for a distorted comic spirit, would entitle you to the honour of the Bullnote Memorial Exhibition. Come, sah, come, there must be some reason. Were you overworked ? ”

“ I worked very hard, Sir,” pleaded Willie.

“ Did you work on Saturday and Sunday ? ”

He hesitated.

“ Come, sah, I will not eat you.” Mr. Rore was nearly smiling.

“ Yes, Sir.”

“ Ah. Therein may be the solution. But you wi’ not take my advice. I am older than you, sir. I can see with clarity. An eleventh hour pressure, sir ! Why, just think of it ! You have done bri’antly, bri’antly ! Ah, foolish boy, why do you waste your mental paar ? That pauper spirit, sir, showing its hand in all our works ! Then you were unaware of this blemish ? ”

“ Yes, Sir.”

“ Ah, yes. Is it your own poetical effort ? ”

“ No, Sir.”

“ Where did you learn it ? ”

“ Here at school, Sir.”

“ Ah, yes. And I dare say it was a rime in Shakespeare’s time, my dear sah ! Or should we say Lord Bacon ? Recently

I have read a book that proves the authorship of the plays. All boys should read it. That reminds me, I will give the Sixth the benefit of my good fortune. They will appreciate it. A tailor's dummy, sah, you Wia'm Shakespeare! The woodcut proves it. By the sleeves. How illusion exists in the human race, sah! Ah, yes, your paper will stand. The Examiners left the final award of a distinction to me. Now, do better next time, my boy. Our trials are sent to test us. You have won the Bullnote Memorial Exhibition. A bri'ant paper, sah. Let me see you, in future, among the workers! You may return, Maddison. Double, double, make up for lost time!"

Which Willie did, meeting a tongue-curling Taffy with happy face. Mr. Croodbrane smiled lazily.

"Ah, the wanderer returned, wha'?"

"Yar," said Willie, coughing as he spoke the word.

"Ahha. Wonderful. You have not been showing to the Head Master your stuffed elephants, have you? Ah, ah, um, Oh, wha'?"

Loose laughter from Vb.

"For one who has recently been—um—interviewed in secluded—um—incarceration, your expression is one of intense optimism, bor. Doubtless you are pleased with the result of your studies! I observe that your name graces a most distinguished place in the list of—um—shall we say, honorary honours. What a pity that there was no paper upon How to Stuff Birds, ahha, wha', um?"

Willie at his seat could afford to look disdainfully at the ceiling, and to raise supercilious eyebrows. He had won the Bullnote—sixty-three volumes of the Everyman Library. He would try for the works of Richard Jefferies, Isaak Walton, and books upon Shooting and Fishing. He would not tell Father. Father should see him appear upon the platform again and again, flushed of face, and stagger off with an armful of books, while Hall was filled with a storm of cheering, and the kids in Lower School would point him out afterwards to their parents and sisters. He would probably have to make a speech, in which case he would tell them how much was due to the Dear Old School.

He would send a copy of the paper to Phillip at Brockley.

During break Golding major offered to bet any one about the results of the Bullnote. As every one favoured Swann, he said he would give three to two in pennies on Swann. The brothers had a preliminary argument about this, and apparently disagreed, so Golding minor retired to another part of the playground and offered three to two in pennies on Slater. In little notebooks they wrote down the names of their clients. Willie called Bony, Rupert, and Jack apart, and hidden behind one of the buttresses in the upper playground he advised them to bet that the winner would be neither Slater nor Swann. They scoffed at first, but he was so in earnest that they pressed for more information. Willie shook his head with profound mystery. Bony jeered that it was absurd, since only those two had got distinctions.

"You won't regret," affirmed Willie. "I've got some inside information. Honest, I have. I swear I have, Bony, you needn't scoff. Have you ever known me tell a lie?"

"Thousands of times."

"Well, perhaps hundreds. But this is on my sacred honour. Carrambo, do it quickly! The bell will go in a seck."

But they would not.

When Vb filed through Hall a minute later the line, straggling by the Senior Notice-board, joined the surge round its green oasis upon which was pinned a small piece of paper with Mr. Rore's tiny writing upon it.

Sen. Lcl. Camb. Exn.

Bullnote Mml. Exhb.

Winner, ex Vc, Vβ, Va, and VI. θ Fms.

W. Maddison.

Hdmstr. offers his congrtlms.

Various effects were made by this amazing news:—

Bony, peering like a lean bird over the heads of the crowd, cracked his fingers and from his throat came a crow-like ejaculation.

Aunt Sally seemed visibly to swell, and his red hair to lose its blood-orange sheen : all he said was " Cuh." His fat legs became gradually elliptical under the disappointment.

Golding major glanced at Golding minor : their eyes were round as pennies.

Swann turned his mild bespectacled face to Willie, smiled whimsically, then sought his hand, murmuring, " I say, I'm awfully glad, Willie." Ever afterwards Willie had a warm affection for Swann.

Effish for once said nothing, but simply stared, while his chum Beckelt shot a blot of ink from his fountain pen upon the paper. In " a mature life " he became a successful journalist upon a Sunday newspaper.

Jack in his joy emptied Fitzacher's satchel on the floor. Several boys immediately commenced to kick the fallen books as far away from Fitzacher as possible.

Cerr-Nore said, " Poo, any fool could have won it. Frankly, who wants the beastly Bullnote ? I don't."

Willie wondered why at the moment of his triumph he felt so uncaring and languid. Nor did this mood change when he got home. He hoped that his father would speak to him again about his homework, and tell him that he was a slacker. Himself would reply nothing, but let father declare many things for which afterwards he would be remorseful. Somewhat disappointingly his father appeared to be in a good temper when after tea he came into the kitchen and Willie managed to slip into a prepared hiding-place a volume of ghastly murder tales lent him by Fitzacher.

Mr. Maddison sat on the edge of the table. Suddenly his son told him that he had " passed his exam all right, and had won the certificate."

" That's good news," commented the father, " it will be advantage to you. This will be your last year at school."

To the boy seated at the table before the pile of books came an unutterable anguish. Mr. Maddison observed his peculiar and eye-wide stare, and went on tonelessly :

" From your expression I suppose you dislike the idea of working for your living. Had you shown any desire for study, or even a mild interest in anything, I should have

tried to give you every help possible to develop any bent. You can't be a schoolboy all your life, you know, just having a lazy, indolent time, and living on the fat of the land. I've been waiting for you to speak about Australia, but I see it hasn't entered your head. Have you anything to say?"

"No, Father."

"'No, Father'? What an extraordinary chap you are! Here am I endeavouring to help you all I can in what I should have thought would have been a subject of interest to yourself, namely, your career, and you haven't even a remark to make, let alone any suggestion. Well, discussion is fruitless, apparently. I've heard from your Uncle Richard. He is prepared to mention about you to the Secretary of the Moon Fire Office. Well?"

Willie replied nothing.

"Aren't you grateful for any one taking a little interest in you?"

"Yes, Father."

"Your gratitude is admirably concealed, my boy. The Moon Fire Office is a good office, I believe. Mr. Rore told me last term that you had plenty of ability, only you were lazy and slipshod. If you are lazy and slipshod in London you won't last very long. The competition there is tremendous, and the weaklings go to the wall."

"That was a gray lag goose honking," suddenly cried Willie, listening to the night outside. Immediately he felt foolish and confused; Mr. Maddison seized upon his involuntary remark.

"Even at a serious moment like this your attention is absorbed by trivial things. I am afraid it's no use my talking to you. Your wretched hobby, or rather obsession, will be your undoing. Well, I shall say no more. Don't blame me, however, when too late you realise your foolishness. Don't come to me and say, 'Why didn't you *make* me work, Father?' You will get no sympathy then. No. I shall have no pub-crawlers around me. Well, I've done my part, any way," and he went out of the kitchen, his slippers dragging on the floor. Willie stifled his misery, and tried to read the tale of a young and beautiful woman found

in an open boat on the Thames, "with a brown stain on her blouse ringed and burnt by three pistol-shots at close quarters." "Foul play was suspected." But it had no interest for him.

When Biddy came in half an hour later she found him with his head hidden in his arms. An unattended fire was low in the grate. She caressed him, he was not responsive. He did not move, and her cherishing grew more tender.

"I'm silly," he complained, after the mood had lightened. "Father said this was my last year here. I've got to go to London then."

"Only for a while, mideaar. Ee'll get on praper, and come back zoon wi' a crock o' gold. Ah, I knows!"

"Oh, Biddy, why do we have to grow up, and become old, and die?"

Already the shadow of past years, gone for all time, was reaching out to him. He saw the brook in summer, with its rippling and its silver flashing, the "river" so romantic to his remembered childhood. There were the rushes stirred by its current, the roach red of fin, the birds splashing by the pebbly cattle-shore. When he was five Biddy had told him of the water-fairies; all one June day he had waited for one to appear and tell him a story. The stream had sang to him, its voice like a swallow's. All that was to be ended, for he was growing up. Why must it be, he cried to himself, and rushed upstairs to his bedroom, flinging wide the window and leaning out into the night. There was no answer in the starry darkness, no reply from the moon peering like the face of a copper owl over the beech wood.

PER ASPERA . . .

YELLOW celandines starred the hedgerows and the meadows, rooks clamoured in the massy beech trees, every day the birdsong grew happier. In March the chiffchaff came to the lakeside, and the sandmartins flitted about the quarry. Easter brought bloom to the willows, and the happy humblebees. After the holidays a number of senior boys had vanished

and over one-half of Vb became Va, a dreaded distinction, thrust upon most of them including Willie. Jack and Bony drifted into the Special Class, the ultimate sanctuary of the majority. This disintegration was accepted without much comment; Willie felt that it was fated.

Mr. Rore instructed Va himself in nearly every subject. It was a term of fear and falsehood. There was slight relief from what they called this "terrible swotting" except when the class sat round Hall in a great ring of forms and copied Mr. Worth's artistically arranged jumble of spheres, pyramids, cylinders, and cubes. Even then Mr. Rore was liable to peer round the doorway of the Va room (which was combined with the Sixth) and "seeing a boy's eyes," which implied wrongdoing, would take him for "that cane" like a hawk seizing a sparrow in the stubble, or make him pay a penny or twopence to the Fresh Air Fund. Then for five hours a week Mr. Waugh in the Chemical Laboratory superintended their research aided with test-tubes, bunsen burners, platinum wires, crucibles, bottles, acids, litmus papers, foul smells, and a score of technical formulæ.

Va was a class of cheats and hypocrites. Its education in worldly wisdom was quickly brought to perfection. Since Mr. Rore set three hours' home-work every night, some methods had to be invented to give the appearance of this amount having been prepared. Among that section inclined towards pauperism (Willie would never have been admitted to Va had he not won the Bullnote Memorial) were a few bold boys who rubbed out the pencilled tick, and showed up the same mathematics again and again, trusting to the Head Master's speed to avoid detection. A pair of boys sat at each desk, and when correcting they exchanged papers. Nine-tenths of Va retained its own papers, and behind piled books jotted down the answers as Mr. Rore read them out. By this means the extraordinary efficiency of the Head Master's methods was being proven continually to himself. Few boys failed to obtain at least seventy-five per cent. of the possible marks. Again, in Latin, he expected four or five pages to be prepared in the allotted space of three-quarters of an hour. Livy and Ovid were indecipherable to most of

Va, but in response to the matutinal query of "how much prepared," no boy showed hands for an amount under four pages. This standard, of course, had to be maintained in practice, so again the ingenious students devised a system by which it was possible to ascertain the exact passage to be translated by each individual, since Mr. Rore began at the lowest boy (word-perfect was his rendition), and allowed the next boy to continue, as he wished. Yet this method was fallible; for one might muck his turn, when it was not unusual for two rows of boys being unable to proceed. Intense agitation greeted a stumbling translator. Behind the eternal pile of books boys crouched, ready to search dictionary or crib as the prairie-fire of "next boy" swept nearer. "Turn, turn," they whispered, "for Gord's sake pass up the turn." Hope rarely deserted Va. After each of a series of disasters a phantom turn would float upwards to the top of the class, followed by another, and another. Those who had been passed crouched stilly over their books, waiting, waiting, waiting, for the end of the day.

Mr. Rore had in his life suffered from neuralgia. The pains of this human ailment had given him a consideration, apparently, for all possible sufferers. Therefore he excluded draughts, and with them, fresh air. The windows were often closed in the hottest weather. Through the glass windows rendered opaque by moisture came the song of thrushes and wrens: in the gloomed school arose the carking hum of learning. So for hundreds of years, hid from summery beauty, the hum of learning had filled the rooms; centuries of labour become nothing; centuries of wasted sunshine, generations dumbly following obsolete methods based upon ignorance. Under the southern eaves the martins built and nested, and sometimes their happy twitter came through the window, heard by Willie as he endured the days.

Everlastingly Mr. Rore spurred himself to an unflagging zeal, girding himself to maximum effort. By the power so acquired and with it a righteous confidence did he urge his boys to do likewise. Continually he sought to drive home his ideals. Thus one day, during a passage of the *Æneid*, he broke in upon the changing murmur of voices:

"Nature speaks ever as the Sphinx. We can but do useful work and take what light it brings. What boys have read Tennyson's *In Memoriam*? Every one except Maddison! I can't hear, sah? Oh, he dislikes poetry! Well, it is to be lamented that he has no ear for music. His mind cannot soar—he is autochthon, of the earth earthy. The poem, boys, states well the problem and the position. Fitzgerald, most musical, most hopeless. *Gather you roses while you may* cannot satisfy. Yet a useful vision of one façade of Nature opening up instructive vistas. *By the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread*. Remember that, boys!

"There is danger in too much introspection. Witness the tragic genius of Francis Thompson. The objective life has its claims. Hardy's *Dynasts* a Promethean effort. But the philosophy of chance and ironic endeavour is not constructive. Nature speaks with many fluted voices. Bernard Shaw most provocative of thought. In vain he breasts the bars of brass. Ours the loss if we stop our ears. But he combines prophecy with excessive egoism. Ponder, Maddison, ponder! Your mind wanders too often, sah! Well, Maddison, what is it? A window open? Very well, two inches, no more. Neuralgia—what boys have suffered? All except Maddison! Lo! he asks for a window!" Mr. Rore smiled round the classroom, and continued:

"It is natural that you, now in youth, should feel sometimes dissatisfied. All our works are webbed with imperfections. And the masses do not discern refined gold. They applaud brass and lacquer. What boys agree? All except Maddison! He sulks about his window?"

"Headache, Sir," mumbled Willie, in a panic at Mr. Rore's attention to himself.

"I'm sorry," murmured the voice of the Head Master, suddenly gentle, and the tortuous lesson went on.

School hours terminated, according to the prospectus, at a quarter-past twelve in the morning and at half-past four in the afternoon. One day Mr. Rore made a suggestion, about extra work. Va, he said, might accept or reject it at will. His proposal was that it stayed till twenty-three minutes after twelve and a quarter to five. A show of hands

was requested. Every boy agreed. The Head Master determined that Va should be privileged, he said ; he did not want to tyrannise, he said ; so he ordered the boy in the desk nearest the door to remind him at those times. This boy was usually Willie, and he performed his duty conscientiously. But occasionally Mr. Rore might be tremendously interested in a problem of Differential Calculus or the Binomial Theorem, and would suggest an extension. "What boys agreed?" All boys agreed. Of what use was dissent? On many occasions after five o'clock a mutinous Va left the inspissated atmosphere of its class-room, weary and grumbling. Often for an hour afterwards Willie had a feeling of hopelessness. The oats were in jag in the fields through which passed the traveller : the wind swayed the barley graceful and topped with hail : it rippled silky currents on the wheat and fluttered the green pennons. Dreamily the spreading colour recharged him, and the depression lifted.

Thus the term went on. Day after day of fear and misery. Jack, being already in the astral security of the Specials, had no homework. Certainly Mr. Worley, who ineffectually tried to dominate the unruly band, and at the same time to control his midgets in 3b, set some homework, but it was either neglected altogether or done during lazy days in Hall. Even for Mr. Rore Willie did very little. He could not, however he feared him. The coming parting with the thyme-grown downs and the swallow-haunted hillsprings, the thickets, and the hedgerows, filled him with sadness. Then his beloved birds, and the flowers—he would have to leave them ; and leave Jack ; and Big Will'um ; Biddy ; and—Elsie. Once he felt so desolated that he prayed for death ; had death appeared he would have been terrified. Sad thoughts gave to his brown eyes a subdued earnestness : even Jack was forsaken sometimes when Willie would wander to the Witch pool, and watch with melancholy the children dipping and shouting. One evening of tranquility he met Dolly coming barefooted and listless along the path through the meadow grasses, and he loitered with her among the poppies and the reddening sorrell spires at the brooklet's marge. Golden flies and green beetles

danced in the westering light of the sun, and the ghost moths spun and hovered by the stream. They spoke of Jim—he would never come back, Dolly told him. The feeling in her heart said so. She had driven him away, she who had yearned to help him. Willie chewed his grass bennet, and turned away his head in sympathy; everywhere about them was the hum of summer. The boy felt a shame when Charlie Cerr-Nore walked past with a friend, and hurriedly left her. He did not realise how Dolly had suffered, and doubly so: sapped by the absence of Jim and the torment of her self-reproach.

SENTIMENT

BUT Dolly was seldom encountered, and he remembered her at rarer intervals. His life was so full and happy—that part of his life lived in the sunlit fields. It was a time of “great sport,” especially when the nearing of Speech Day caused a ginger-haired man in a cape and wide black hat, and about four feet six inches in stature, to appear at Colham Grammar School. This was Mr. Weeds, the music master. Every boy enjoyed his coming, on account of choir-practice and its attending easy time, and because they liked Old Beerface. All one morning pairs of boys were summoned to the piano in Hall, and those who were not immediately rejected were put among the trebles, altoes, tenors, and basses. Willie was placed among the tenors, for which he was sorry, since Bony, Jack, Macarthy, Clemow, Hoys, and all his other friends were selected as basses.

The practices were enjoyable. Mr. Weeds, with the approval of the Head Master, chose *The Wreck of the Hesperus* for Speech Day. Three mornings a week the Hall was filled with the noises of practice. Shrill trebles piped their parts, combining sometimes with a band of altoes hooting and cooing most dismally. Again and again the deep basses growled, *It was the schooner Hesperus that sailed the wintry sea*, then the mellow altoes took up the story, *And the skipper had taken his little daughter to bear him company*. Now was the chance of the squeaking trebles, *Blue were her eyes as*

the fairy-flax, Her cheeks like the dawn of day And her bosom white as the hawthorn buds That ope in the month of May. Thus in portions would the tale be told. Sometimes Old Beerface sang the refrain as a solo ; he was wonderfully clever ; being able to sing in a high falsetto, a celloine alto, a tenor ringing though nasal, and a basso profundo of tremendous power and pathos, remarkable in such a small man.

Willie among the scanty tenors soon learned the melodies, and did his best to swamp the numerous basses that just in rear bellowed thunderously. He urged the dozen or so singers of his own section to yell with such effect that the basses would be inaudible on Speech Day. He strained his voice and grew so red in the face that Mr. Weeds spoke to him about it.

During the last weeks Mr. Croodbrane joined the basses. He sat just behind Willie, and blast-like noises came sonorously from him. Even the addition of Mr. Dimmer and Mr. Ellison to the tenors in no wise subdued the awful stentor. Mr. Rattlethrough, fingering nervously his oakum moustache and wearing his torn gown, joined the tenors too, but he was tone-deaf, and by his amiable cacophony threw the whole harmony into discord. He appeared oblivious of this drawback, and continued with cheerful earnestness to sing wrong notes and at wrong moments. He came but once, but was heard frequently in class to be humming his part, to the accompaniment of fingernail-nibbling and knee vibration.

Speech Day drew nearer. A restless excitement drifted about the school. Horizontal and parallel bars, the vaulting horse, ropes and rings were removed. The face of the clock was cleaned, and it promptly stopped. Strings of flags were arranged overhead, radiating from the circular gas-ring. The obsolete display of the illustrated weeklies was removed from the walls, and the dust from various ledges flicked to the floor. The portrait-frame of the late Dr. Bullnote, D.D., had a wreath of spotted laurel-leaves pinned to its top. Gangs of boys were set to work. Effish and Beckelt endeavoured upon all occasions to hinder and confuse. The miniature platform supporting the desks of some masters

were commandeered, lugged by shuffle-footed boys to Hall, and laid against the main platform.

The day before Speech Day came, spent in a whirl of work and ragging. Partitions were rolled back, disclosing hollow and unfamiliar class-rooms. Wastepaper baskets were emptied over the heads of smaller boys. Mr. Worth's models suffered an unnecessary violence, and a sphere fell in two, upsetting him considerably. Inkwells were emptied into desks, books intermingled, pens shattered, and rubber solution stuck on the seats. These systematic annoyances were organised by the Specials, since they had to maintain the traditional attitude of disorder upon such an occasion.

Mr. Rore, never flurried but always working at the highest speed, announced that a rehearsal would take place that afternoon. Willie and Jack knew what a rehearsal meant; they had been in one before. It meant hauling gymnastic apparatus upon the conglomerated platform: it meant coming out of the open space behind the platform composed of the combined class-rooms of Mr. Dimmer, Mr. Worth, and Mr. Rattlethrough a dozen times like a swarm of apathetic ants: it meant sitting still on narrow crowded forms while masters argued, pointed, directed, and wilted before Mr. Rore: it meant having one's knees cracked against the form in front and an awful lot of dust. So they avoided the afternoon rehearsal, and went to Rookhurst instead by the wood. In the beech wood the young rooks made a vast commotion and flapping, for they were out of their nests.

"Elsie will be home soon," mentioned Willie. They were sitting on the roots of a mighty tree exposed by a slidden bank. The dancing shadow of summer came to their knees.

Jack said nothing. In the dreamy beauty of the afternoon they rested. A woodpecker came round a bole, so still were they, and a treecreeper made its mouse-like progress along another branch.

*At daybreak on the bleak sea-beach
A fisherman stood aghast
To see the form of a maiden fair
Lashed close to a drifting mast.*

It was Elsie who was drowned. He was the fisherman. Somewhere on the lonely coast of Devon he had been living alone, broken-hearted. The sands were yellow, and great rocks towered above. Attracted by the drifting wreckage, he had come out of his lone cottage, eyes shaded by his hand. He was a recluse, retired from the world when Elsie had married some one else. He was standing by the sea now, aghast.

*The salt sea was frozen on her breast
The salt tears in her eyes,
And he saw her hair, like the brown seaweed
On the billows fall and rise.*

The shadows, so light and fluttering, were now dim.

And he saw her hair, like the brown seaweed

A hand was laid on his knee. He turned away. The shadows were gone.

. . . like the brown seaweed—the brown seaweed.

He did not move. The hand caressed his shoulder—a loving hand. A voice said:

“Don’t, Willie, I can’t stand it. What have I done?”

Willie let his friend see the tears on his cheek, and smiled into those eyes of friendship now puzzled and hurt.

“What had you been thinking of, Willie?”

“Oh, nothing.”

“Is it anything I’ve done?”

“No.”

“We’re friends for ever, aren’t we?”

“Yes.”

“Yet you don’t tell me much. You’re everything to me. Why can’t you be the same to me, Willie?”

“You are my best friend, Jack.”

“Yes, but yet I don’t seem able to help you. Often you are sad. Why is it?”

"I don't know, really."

The leaves stirred, the shadow dance went on.

After a while he said :

"This tree would make a fine cave."

"Rather."

"We can have this for our headquarters in the battle."

"Let's explore !"

Certainly it was a glorious hiding place. It was possible to creep far inside, under the rootlets holding chalky soil that their laboured crawling dislodged. They were wriggling out when a sharp bark made them look intently. Bill Nye was sitting outside, smoking a cigar of coltsfoot leaves, and grinning. He had a rabbit in the pocket of his loose, torn coat, caught by the ridiculous animal Tiger that fawned upon them and licked their faces, brushing the ground with its fox-like tail.

GRAND ASSEMBLY

UPON the augmented platform in their robes of office the Governors of Colham Grammar School—the Worshipful Company of Bellowsellers—leaned back in the chairs specially hired for the occasion, and the senior boys behind had during the monotonous addresses and reports their annual view of the backs of their heads. The addresses and the Head Master's report for the Year having terminated in a ghostly clapping, it seemed, from far away under the strings of flags—where in Hall parents and relatives were nearly as uncomfortably arranged as the boys—Mr. Rattlethrough appeared at a side entrance. He wore a new gown, his hair was smooth and shining ; one end of his moustache was waxed to a point ; the other from constant nervous nibbling was wet and drooping. Mr. Rattlethrough beckoned imperatively, earnestly, with profound importance, a weighty anxiety pressing on his brow and emerging from his blue eyes.

"Come along, tho-ose boys," he hissinglly whispered, spinning the masticated end of his moustache with his tongue, "come along there, what are you waiting for ? Hush, er,

hush that boy"—he glanced fearfully at that portion of the Governors' heads visible—"oh, hurry, hurry!"

One of Mr. Rattlethrough's duties was to superintend the collection of prize takers. He managed to put every one into a state of confusion. He moved about, chewing and fingering his moustache, and feeling that failure was inevitable. For some of the prize-takers were among the choir, others were changing into gymnastic costume for the *tableaux* superintended by Willbarrow the gymnastic instructor. Others, having been detailed for refreshment-waiters after the Ceremonies, had disappeared, presumably considering that cakes were more important than prizes.

"Are you ready, Mr. Rattlethrough," inquired Mr. Rore, magnificent in a new gown and hood.

"Er . . . yes . . . Sir, er . . . yes," sibilated the French master, "er . . . yes, I think so. Of course . . . er . . . that is to say, a . . . er . . . a little confusion exists on account of . . . er . . . the gymnastic——"

"Quite, quite," murmured the Head Master. Willie was standing near, silent in the presence of mightiness, dressed in a black coat, an undersized "butterfly" collar that pinched his neck, and striped trousers. "But surely that was rehearsed correctly? Come, Mr. Rattlethrough. The Governors await. The Award of Prizes must commence."

"Yes, yes . . . er . . . Head Master . . . yes, yes."

But Mr. Rattlethrough, his face screwed with pain, continued to spin (or so it appeared to Willie) one side of his moustache. The Head Master swiftly rose to the crisis.

"Another quarter of an hour. Anthony!"

He addressed a Sixth Form boy, who in a tail coat was standing near, muttering to himself and rubbing the palms of his hands with a handkerchief.

"*Morte d'Arthur!*"

"Now, Sir?"

"Immediately! Follow!"

Mr. Rore turned about, and Anthony, mumbling "Dogs-boddy" and with a glazed eye, shuffled after him.

With a feeble imitation of recklessness, induced by repeated

shootings of his cuffs, Anthony mounted the platform. Two of the Governors of the Worshipful Company of Bellow-sellers looked at him with beneficent interest ; the remainder, with one exception, lolled back drowsily. The exception was a very old man with glossy white hair named Major-General Craugh-Cliftonhaugh—he was asleep and snoring faintly ; he had eaten too much at luncheon and drunk more champagne than any one else. Every year he gave the same address, telling them to shoot straight and to remember the honour of the regiment. Every year he ate too much at Speech Day luncheon, and drank too much champagne, bad as it was, so his speech invariably came last ; till then a vague droning came from his chair.

Mr. Rore whispered to the Most Worshipful Master, who after repeated attempts to understand him, rose to his feet, removed his spectacles, cleared his throat, and announced that Canworthy would sing a patriotic ballad. More whisperings ; he again cleared his throat, and corrected himself : the lad's name was Damfoney, and he would recite. During this preliminary, Anthony was leaning, limp with fright, against the doorway. Faint clappings rippled under the flags as he moved forward, coughing despairfully and plucking at his coat-tails. The unusual location of the pocket caused him to search desperately for the handkerchief that a moment before he had stuffed there ; he had a conviction that he needed to blow his nose. At last he hooked it out, and it fell to the floor, he turned and saw Mr. Rore's eyes upon him, and his throat dried up.

The Governors waited, the Visitors waited, the black squirming nonentities behind waited. Anthony stared at the specially-hired carpet, but no inspiration came from its damasked pattern. His head was bowed ; a trembling figure in the tail-coat, white kid gloves in his left hand, starched collar and immaculate bow-tie, exquisite cuffs and patent leather shoes—all for nothing. No pennant moved on its string, only the soft droning of the old Governor who slept with fat hands round a chain-hung paunch. Suddenly Anthony looked up. In a wild high voice he gabbled :—

*" Then from out the lake rose a white arm
Clothed in white samite !
Wistic ! !
Monderful !
And seized Excalibur ! "*

He knew no more, so retired amid sympathetic clappings from parents and relatives, and subdued laughter from behind.

After this the Most Worshipful Master distributed the Prizes. The first senior boys were clapped, but after a while the sultry air in Hall rendered this too much of an exertion. The Golding brothers had a fine reception ; their little band of relatives (who had secured the best seats) applauded quite noticeably. Both had a long armful of books, mostly with gilt edges. One after another the prize-takers, each feeling that the gaze of every visitant was for himself alone, trooped across the carpet, shook hands with the Most Worshipful Master, was handed a volume or volumes, and disappeared in a doorway beyond. Willie's triumphal passing with sixty-three volumes of the Everyman Library did not take place, his expectations having been shattered when the Head Master, a month before, had informed him that three volumes of the *Bible in Art* would be his reward. However, these three volumes were of immense size and thickness, which perhaps compensated for the subject. When all the books had been presented, the smiling athletes, most of them clad in gymnastic dress, came across to receive their trophies. The black and sweltering mass behind rose on the forms and cheered frenziedly as Fortescue, his red face smiling, took a mighty silver cup from the Most Worshipful Master. He was, of course, the Champion of the School. The Most Worshipful Master congratulated the Champion of the School on his magnificent prowess in the field. He hoped that equal prowess would be displayed in the conflict of a mature life, when perhaps the Champion of the School would bring home the Challenge Cup of Life for the honour of the Old Country and the Old School. He made a few more involved remarks, each of which called forth applause from Hall and hoarse

shoutings from behind, and then shook Nosey's hand many times. The Champion retired, but to return again and again for a silver clock, a set of fish knives and forks, an alarm clock, a tennis racquet, a silver butter-dish, and a silver-plated jam-jar, a gold-mounted fountain pen and a silver inkpot, a silver-plated teapot and a pair of nut-crackers. Once more he returned, for a shilling pair of blunt scissors that was the reward of tug-o'-war. Excitement in Hall among white-clad sisters died down, and the frenzy behind subsided, and with it two whole rows of boys who had been standing on the forms. Effish and Beckelt had arranged that small piece of fun, which caused Mr. Rattlethrough the most poignant anxiety. "Quiet there, quiet, quiet!" he pleaded.

The prizes upon the table having disappeared, the Most Worshipful Master repeated the address that he had given for the past ten years. He was glad, he told them, that the same spirit of excellence brooded over the Old School. Had anybody received as a prize a copy of that wonderful book, Smile's *Self Help*? That was a fine book, and one that should be by every hearth-side. It was that spirit that made the Old Country what it was. Smile's *Self Help* won the battle of Waterloo—it was that spirit that made Alfred conquer the Danes—it was——

The Most Worshipful Master spoke some more, but no one listened to him, chiefly because his delivery was so extremely bad. He seemed to be talking through a mouthful of mashed potato. Once Effish whispered "Lips and teeth, sah!" Throughout the address the ancient Governor snored tranquilly.

Mr. Rore replied, in his incisive, clear tones. Every endeavour was made to maintain the traditional tone of the School. Every boy was encouraged to reason for himself. ("Liar," whispered Effish in a hollow voice.) Every pupil was made to realise the vaa'ue of work. *To the stars through difficulties!* That was the translated motto of the School. Mankind by continual research and thought could achieve immensities. By constant striving, not among themselves, but upwards to an ideal, Mankind could eliminate the ills of civilisation. After the ills, real progress could be made.

Mankind could think Itself to any degree of perfection. One might eliminate even Chance, that ironic factor, wind-like, blowing where it listeth over the human race!

The Year's Work was satisfactory. The efforts of his colleagues were rewarded. The students, especially the senior students, had done well. The results of the Senior Cambridge Local Examination were praiseworthy. Himself was fortunate in having such a bri'ant staff.

Every one applauded, Mr. Rattlethrough giving a solo when the others had stopped.

"And now," concluded Mr. Rore, "our Aesthetes have been rewarded, we are to be entertained by our Athletes, under Sergeant Willbarrew."

Immediately three boys ran on to the platform to move the table, but the premature enthusiasm, undiminished by a dozen rehearsals, was checked by the authoritative voices of several young and sprightly masters. The three boys effaced themselves; the old General was awakened tactfully by a prod in the paunch, and he made a grab at his chain, as though fearing larceny. Led by the Most Worshipful Master, the Governors walked from the platform and occupied reserved seats in front.

Sergeant Willbarrew, who in his younger days had been an army gymnastic instructor, had led such a sloppy life at the school that every part of him seemed to sag. His ears sagged, his cheeks sagged, giving to his face the likeness of an octopus or sea-parrot. His arms and chest and thighs were immense, with muscle run to fat. He wore a white singlet and flannel trousers, and the boards sagged and creaked as he walked over in his immense rubber shoes. It was indeed fortunate that a skinny kid of 2c had been chosen to wave the flag at the top of the human pyramid, and not Willbarrew.

The gymnastic display over, the vaulting horse and parallel bars were removed, and a horde of boys appeared with a grand piano. This was placed in the middle of the platform, and Mr. Ellison, who with importance was directing the emplacement, managed to get his toe under one of the legs, but he said nothing audibly. Then Mr. Weeds, gowned

and with a hood of white fur and pink silk, stepped upon the platform, and gave the signal. Immediately black-coated boys debouched from behind, and ranged themselves into crescentic formation. Hall waited. Choir-boys cleared their throats. The maestro went to the piano. Scores were fluttered, more throats cleared. Mr. Croodbrane coughed, partly in preparation, partly to attract the attention of his friends in Hall. The music began. Mr. Weeds nodded.

It was the schooner Hesperus

Never had there been such lovely melody, thought Willie in the back row. How sweetly the trebles were singing.

Blue were her eyes as the fairy-flax.

Then surely his own voice was floating above the voices of the others when the tenors were singing—

*Last night, the moon had a golden ring,
But to-night no moon we see :*

answered thunderously by the basses,—

*The skipper he blew a whiff from his pipe
And a scornful laugh laughed he !*

The ardour of every one increased as the storm came on, and from the grand piano, with its raised lid, crashed the chords of terror. Now the blue-eyed maiden—Elsie—was crying :—

*Oh, Father ! I hear the sound of bells ;
Oh, say, oh, say, what can it be ?*

Mr. Norman, the skipper, was lashing her to a mast. Great barbarous waves were slapping against the side of the barque, and pouring in cold green masses over the deck. Through the mist was heard the warning bell on the reef.

How could the parents in Hall keep silent, why were they not weeping, when the music died and the sweet altoes were telling of the drowned maid.

At daybreak on the bleak sea-beach.

More slowly and sadly they sang. Now was the great part, the loveliest moment, the most haunting melody. If only his own voice could fill Hall and persuade the Visitors, fanning with their programmes, and the Governors, looking so bored, of the exquisite tragedy.

*The salt sea was frozen on her breast
The salt tears in her eyes,
And he saw her hair, like the brown seaweed*

(Deeper and sadder flowed the song)—

*And he saw her hair, like the brown seaweed,
On the billows fall—and rise.*

The choir paused, Mr. Weeds repeated the refrain. Several people were coughing, and many talking. "Shut up," nearly yelled Willie. The grand ending commenced, every singer opening full his throat.

*Such was the wreck of the Hesperus
In the midnight and the snow!
God save us all from a death like this
On the reef of Norman's Woe!*

Now they were clapping, and it was over.

The school song followed, a miserable anti-climax, Willie considered; words and music by Heland H. Donkin, the big bug in Whitehall, who was sitting in front with the Governors.

*Come, sons of Colham,
Come one, come all!*

*Tell out in joyful song
The stirring deeds on heath and field
To which we all belong.
Or lost or won
The games we play
Will stir our hearts
For many a day.*

Mr. Donkin, the big bug in Whitehall, joined breezily in the chorus.

*Then, gather, ye Sons of Colham, around
Your voices lend with a will
Here's jolly good luck
To every man !
And a cheer, Hurrah !!
A cheer, HURRAR !!!
For the school on the Hill ! ! ! !*

The choir got out of hand during the last verse, so overwhelmed were the boys by sentiment for the School on the Hill. Mr. Donkin's eyes were moist, and the Governors' faces took on an appearance of animation ; but it may have been because the singing was almost over.

After Major-General Craugh-Cliftonhaugh had delivered his mechanical words of dodderly encouragement, the Most Worshipful Master announced that the morrow would be a whole holiday. Behind cheered wildly ; Hall smiled tolerantly.

The Specials decided not to throw the stink-bombs they had prepared, but to creep into Hall instead, and, under a pretence of serving the Visitors (a privilege of the Sixth alone) to "have a guzzle." Willie and Jack joined them, the former with his three immense prizes under his arm, and Jack with a pair of scissors—the reward for tug-o'-war. After a gorgeous guzzle they moved among the Visitors, Willie carrying his prizes because he hoped that some of the chaps' sisters, who were pretty, would be impressed by them. Several shy glances came to him, invitations to talk, of

course, but somehow no girl appeared to be beautiful: no girl resembled Elsie.

"There's your father," said Willie. "Shall we go and see them?"

"No," replied Jack, "he may want to be introduced to the Old Bird. I say, look at old Taffy over there, grinning at Bony's guv'nor! Beastly cunning hypocrite, eh? I bet he don't guess how Taffy clumps his son's nut! And there's Ratpoison!"

"He ought to be in Madam Two-Swords, eh? Oh, Carrambo, I beg your pardon, madam!"

There was a tearing sound, for he had been standing on the dress of a lady who was talking to Mr. Kenneth; Mr. Kenneth wore a "brainstarver" so tall that it appeared to conceal that portion of his face below the tips of his ears.

"Bunk," whispered Jack, who had seen Mr. Rore looking at him.

And giggling, they bunked.

. . . AD ASTRA

FROM the mud of the river the sun, burning in untracked space, raised for the iris a golden treasure of flower. By the heaps of stones on the road to Rookhurst Willie saw the viper's bugloss growing, and once, straying over the "moors," as the Earl of Slepe's wildfowl preserves were called, Jack and he watched a hairy plant called the sundew trapping a fly. There were orchis flowers, too, and the star-like yellow cluster of the bog asphodel. Once they flushed a large gray bird that Willie declared excitedly to be one of the rare harriers—a kind of cowardly hawk, he explained to Jack, who wished that he had had a gun with him. They had quite an argument about shooting rare birds, but the quarrel, as usual, did not last many minutes, and eventually Jack said that he was sorry. Willie immediately replied that if he had had a gun, he would probably have shot the harrier—in excitement, of course.

An incident occurred about a week after Speech Day

that, unfortunate as it appeared at the time, led to happiness for the friends. It was during a visit of one-half of Va to Mr. Waugh, the Chemistry master who was known as Hoxxygen Horace. This gentleman, from Manchester, had a habit of creeping up behind boys and listening to their conversation, and then staring at them for perhaps a minute at a time while the whole class looked on and tittered. Mr. Waugh's face and body were lean, and over his face a skin, resembling the covering of that vulgar object, the sausage, was stretched tightly, intensifying the thinness of the lips and giving his cheeks the suggestion of having been glazed; while his eyes possessed the hue and appearance of congealed drops of fish-glue.

Effish, whose knowledge had been augmented by experiments conducted at home with a Magician set of chemicals, came to Willie during an analysis of a mixture and suggested a joke. If Willie crept into the store-room and took some lumps of potassium chlorate Effish would tell him what to do.

Willie came back with a beaker full of the compound, and Effish, sniggering to himself, advised him to put it in a flask with some concentrated sulphuric acid and to heat the contents.

"I'll do the same," he sniggered.

Effish may have meant to do the same, but when from Willie's bench came a series of crackling explosions there was no disturbance at his own. Boys crowded round, and Effish, who was going to be a chemist, pretended to fall into a fit, accompanied by groans. As the mixture began to boil the detonations increased.

"Git bark," warned the Chemistry master.

The boys rushed away, managing to upset a long desk and to jerk a dozen inkwells from their holes. In the confusion Effish slipped into the store-room and began to mingle the contents of several jars of chemicals. Then he pushed a jar of nitric acid through the window, which happened to fall on Colham Charlie, the school cat, who in a warm corner was sleeping off the effects of school luncheon. Some of the acid spilled on its coat, and Colham Charlie rushed away yowling wildly.

Meanwhile the flask, with a sinister spluttering of boiling acid, had cracked and brownish choking fumes were causing irritation to various throats; thus encouraged, Va started to cough and groan and even catawaul. Mr. Waugh yelled to them to go into the playground, and started to fill a pail with water. He advanced towards the smoking bench and sluiced the contents of the pail just as Willie, earnestly endeavouring to make amends, managed to empty a pail of water over Mr. Waugh, who swore at him in the hideous accent of his native town.

Five minutes later the porter Crinkle, who had been badly scratched by the cat, was fanning three boys hanging head downwards from a pair of parallel bars. They were the Golding twins and Effish, and they complained of a choking feeling in the lungs, so Mr. Rore, arguing that the gas was heavier than air, ordered the posture. The foresight of the three was rewarded, for as soon as they said they felt better Mr. Rore told them to go home and on no account to do any preparation that evening. Indeed his instructions were unnecessary, since Effish in the Specials never did any; and the Goldings had already secured the term's reward, and labour otherwise was distasteful to their subliminal nature.

Immediately afterwards the Head Master was interrupted by Mr. Rattlethrough, who came to him, spectacles in hand and with an anguished face, and commenced a long disjointed complaint about the insolence of Dove during the instruction of "Commercial French."

"*This-s-s-is boy*, Sir . . . er . . . has . . . er been . . . er . . . insolent, Sir. . . ."

"Yes, yes, Mr. Rattlethrough, you may cane him."

"*This-s-s-is boy*, Sir——"

"I understand, Mr. Rattlethrough. Give him six."

"Er"—Mr. Rattlethrough stammered—"this-s-s-is boy, Sir, should have . . . er . . . sterner . . . er . . . er . . . sterner punishment."

Willie, waiting to be taken before Mr. Rore, listened with a ghastly fascination. Dove winked at him. Mr. Rore was sitting at his high desk, and he was displeased with the

interruption. The Sixth Form, however, welcomed it, for they had time to adjust the mucked turn in the painful translation of the *Metamorphoses*.

"Yes, Mr. Rattlethrough?" he inquired, impatiently, leaning sideways and presenting his ear. Mr. Rattlethrough placed a typewritten sheet before the Head Master. Quickly Mr. Rore scanned it, then peered at Dove over his semi-circular glasses.

"This is serious, Mr. Rattlethrough. In our midst we shelter a Juvenal, or a Junius!" he said. "Or should I say another Pope with warped vision. But tell me, Mr. Rattlethrough!"

"*This-s-s-is boy*," commenced the French master, "when I asked him if he knew who had written this pornographic epistle to me, he replied that he did. I asked him to tell me why, but he refused."

Mr. Rore glanced at the letter before him. Only once before had he known of a master receiving an anonymous letter.

*To T. D. Pelham Rattlethrough, Esquire,
M.A., Oxon.; B.F., etc.*

Dear French Master,—This is written by one who thinks you ought to leave Colham School, and return to Bedbridge. You are a fool. You can't help your ugly face, but your disgusting habits are the limit. You talk about us "corfin' and snivvin'," but what price your nails and whiskers? Is that what they did at Bedbridge? Ar key ay ler toor? Sayta moir merseer. Ay beang, continuay, sivooplay, Boy Rattlethrough! Stand out thar, stoopid fool!! RATPOISON, DON'T STARE AT US YOU GRINNIN' GRAWBEY!!!

You are a cursed beast, Ratpoison. For your own good you must be told. Failing instant improvement, the Owl Club will do you in one dark night. Also, why don't you go and see your House play cricket sometimes? And who robbed the oddmedodd of its blue serge suit? Also, don't jig your knee; you're not nursing Baby Rattlethrough! Beware, you pauper spirit, because you are properly sized up by the HEAD

MASTER. *I know, my old bellowing blithering backbiter! What should be, shall be, and so you are told to improve!*

This scandalous communication was unsigned. Mr. Rore frowned, and whispered to the form master.

"Have you read this out to the class, Mr. Rattlethrough?"

"Er . . . yes, Sir . . . er . . . most naturally. *This-s-boy*——"

"Tut tut. Well Dove. Did you write it?"

"No, Sir."

"Do you know who wrote it?"

"No, Sir."

"But Mr. Rattlethrough said that you did."

"I said I knew something about it, Sir."

"What do you know, sah?"

"That it's very rude, Sah."

The Sixth tittered: Mr. Rore looked up: there was instant silence.

"You are insolent, Dove. Three, Mr. Rattlethrough!"

While Dove was being caned, Mr. Waugh made a disconnected and rambling account of the malicious damage done in the laboratory. Mr. Rore said that he would deal with Willie, the door was firmly but politely closed on Mr. Waugh, and Willie was ordered to stare at the cream-coloured wall until such time as the Head Master thought fit to punish him.

After seventy-eight minutes of nervous tension and eye-strain for the culprit, Mr. Rore said gently:

"Follow."

He led the way to his study. The door closed behind Willie.

Mr. Rore went to the cupboard. He took an enormous cane, thought Willie.

"Well, sah, what have you to say?" he incised.

Willie said nothing.

"CAN'T HEAR!" bellowed Mr. Rore, turning his ear to Willie, who with a hysterical gulp wondered what would happen if he were to blow down the hole.

"Wasting my time, sah. You've got that pauper spirit.

You are no use here, sah. You will leave at the end of the term. Over, over. No, hands right over, stretch your arms. Think! Shan't happen again. You must not do those things. Think now, eyes closed. Keep your arms stretched, sah! Now think! Still, sah, still! More if you wriggle! Think! You've got to get that paar! An extra one for wriggling. Now report to Mr. Worley. The Special Class. Don't let it happen again! Double, sah, double!!"

Thenceforward Willie sat in Hall with the other Specials engaged in killing time by various methods. He felt happy that he was with Jack and Bony, and about a dozen other boys, including the dreamy Yeates who chewed american gums during the intervals of scratching the varnish off the desk with his pen. Dove was with them, always merry, and fighting with Beckelt. Long boring hours in Hall drifted by in a luxurious indolence. They played football with a piece of paper: they flung inky tennis balls at the wall: they interchanged the notices on the various boards: they fought for the bell with the boy from Vc who announced the hours, depriving him of the satisfaction of shaking it vigorously: they scattered caps for toy pistols on the floor for the classes interweaving through Hall to detonate: they flung paper darts at the ceiling, and orange peel at Dr. Bullnote, D.D. Once Dove took down an obsolescent number of *The Illustrated London News* and substituted for it the spread pages of *La Vie Parisienne* that a sailor-brother had brought home with him; and Effish gave a bizarre touch to the feminine illustrations by the addition of inky beards and moustaches. Mr. Ellision, emerging suddenly from 2b to see the time, saw the drawings, and tore them down. Ever afterwards the Specials respected him, for his remarks upon that occasion were:—

"There would be hell and the devil to pay if the Old Man saw. Advise you not to do it again. Very humorous though."

With this he popped back in to 2b class-room and through the partition they heard him yell in his high-pitched jerky voice:—

"Peacock minimus, come out here. I don't care if

Dingleberry did take your pencil. That's no excuse for eating sweets. Dingleberry, return the pencil to Peacock minimus. I don't believe your sister gave it to you. Bottomley don't kick the grating. Winkle minor, you are cheating off Winkle major's paper. Oh, you naughty boy! Stand on the form, Winkle minor!"

Then followed the sounds of faint sobbing, probably from the weebegone Winkle minor standing on the form.

The weeks spent with the Special Class were the happiest in Willie's school-life. Owing to the smallness of the class it was possible to know intimately every boy, and in those boys whom he had disliked before Willie found much that was lovable. One day the Specials had a debate about Friendship that warmed Willie's heart.

"You know," suggested the dreamy Yeates, swallowing an american gum, "You know, Willie, you're a funny bloke. You take such violent dislikes to a fellow, then you like him. Doesn't he, chaps?"

The chaps agreed. Dove said:

"I vote that Mad Willie's all right."

"Don't get cocky, young Dove!" replied Mad Willie, embarrassed. But Dove did not hear him, for having just completed a dart made from a pen belonging to some one else he was standing up and about to hurl it upwards to the roof.

The astral happiness of the Specials in Hall was sometimes interrupted by visitations from Mr. Worley, who had abandoned his futile attempts at moustache-growing and assumed with the responsibilities of matrimony the bare face of his boyhood. Mr. Worley, since he had been married only a month when Willie was injected into the Specials, may have suffered under the delusion that he was as important a figure in the eyes of the Specials as he was in the eyes of his bride. At any rate he had lately developed a habit of dictatorial interference regarding their work in Hall, and frequently his door opened and in a tinny voice he required each boy to show up his efforts of the past hour.

"Pills to Worley," remarked a rowdy boy named Burrell one day; "hasn't he enough to do to manage those kids

in 3b without sticking his twisted snout into our business. Let's rag him!"

The opportunity came the next day, when after school Mr. Worley came to the Specials at their desks in 3b classroom—two rows of which they occupied—and gave to each boy a piece of notepaper and an envelope of the coarsest and cheapest paper. The weekly letter, apparently considered an important part of their business training, was an innovation of his own which, on being suggested, was approved immediately by an uncaring Head Master who, like Nature, had but little regard for the inferior individuals of a species.

"Now then," the tinny voice insisted, "just you in the Special class listen to me now. Every one pay attention to me. For to-night's letter I want you to write a letter to the newspapers. Each boy may choose his own subject. Now then, is that quite clear to every boy? A letter to the newspapers. Stop talking, there. Maddison, you haven't paid the slightest heed to my words. I distinctly heard you use a foul and obscene swear-word! Go into Mr. Rore! Continue with the book-keeping, and prepare shorthand for an hour. Now is that quite clear to every boy?"

The Specials found Willie lounging in Hall, waiting for them. He suggested that they all wrote a silly letter about the cuckoo, and next afternoon, when Mr. Worley ordered with nasal briskness Burrell to read his effort, Burrell began:—

"To the Editor of the Daily Mail.

"Dear Sir——"

"I should say 'Sir,'" corrected Mr. Worley pleasantly, "dispense with unnecessary affection, especially where the *Daily Mail* is concerned. Haha."

"Why?" asked Burrell.

"Don't be impertinent, Burrell! And call a master 'Sir'! Go on, Burrell!"

"Sir,—Yesterday afternoon while walking in the woods I heard a cuckoo calling——"

“ ‘Singing’ would be better,” advised the master.

“ *Surely this is early to hear its song ?* ”

“ ‘To hear its call,’ I would suggest. A cuckoo, strictly speaking, has no song, Burrell.”

“ Yes, sir. *Yours faithfully, Horace Burrell.* ”

“ A short letter, Burrell, for three-quarters of an hour’s work.”

“ I did not want to pad it, Sir.”

“ Ah, that is right, Burrell. Now Yeates, read yours.”

Yeates began :—

“ *Dear Auntie Belle—*”

“ Now then, no nonsense, Yeates ! ” warned Mr. Worley.

“ I am writing to *Home Notes*, Sir ! ”

“ Go on.”

“ *Dear Auntie Belle,—I have something of import to impart. Can you guess what it is ? No ? Then I’ll impart. Yesterday, while perambulating in a bosky dell I heard a mocking call. It called again and again, so cheerfully, so I thought I would write to you about it. The little birds chirped, and the leaves danced, because it was the cuckoo back again. I was so happy that I recalled that old poem beginning ‘What should be shall be, or, why are we all pauper spirits, with the exception of the Roaring Warbler ?’* ”

Several boys shouted with laughter, and Mr. Worley went red in the face. “ Take that trash in to Mr. Rore,” he yelled through his nose.

With an injured air, and his pale face amazed, Yeates walked out of the room, watched by the silent little chaps of 3b.

“ Go on, Effish,” ordered Mr. Worley.

Effish smirked, rolled his eyes, gazed around him, and then gabbled :—

" *To the Editor.*

" *Sir——*"

" To the Editor of what ? "

" Yes, Sir."

" What do you mean ? Don't be impertinent. Now then !
To what paper are you writing ? "

" To no particular paper, Sir."

" Well, it's wrong. You should have addressed it to one."

" Which one, Sir ? " asked Effish respectfully.

" Oh, don't be foolish. If you don't put any address, how can you expect it to reach its destination."

" But I wasn't going to post it, Sir, to any. I thought it was just a lesson."

" Go on, Beckelt."

Beckelt began :—

" *Dear Sir,—I think that Mr. Balfour should see about it——*"

then he stopped. He could not improvise further ; he had not read his letter because he feared to be sent in to the Head Master.

" Go on, Beckelt," cried an exasperated Mr. Worley.

Beckelt squirmed, and the master asked to see his letter.

" Now then. Have you all written about the same subject ? I thought so ! You are a lot of fools. All will be kept in till five o'clock this evening."

But when half-past four came, all the Specials went home, including Yeates who had been skulking in the lavatory ; and the next morning Mr. Worley made no mention of the matter.

Pleasantly the end of term drew near, and the boys spoke eagerly of the time when they would be free of the tyrannies of school. Burrell was going to an Agricultural College, Bony was going into the works of the Colham and District Gasworks Company, Effish was going to learn the chemistry of brewing, while Beckelt's occupation, like his morals, was

uncertain. Jack and Willie would return no more, but Clemow, Hoys, Yeates, Macarthy, and three others would not leave till Christmas. One day Bony came to school with a cheerful grin on his face, and he did not join the others in Hall after prayers, but went instead into Mr. Rore's study. Later he emerged, and a dozen curious boys demanded if he had left. The lank naturalist replied that they had guessed his secret. One and all agreed that he was a lucky dog. Bony assured them that he was a lucky dog, but, he said, he was having a week's holiday before going into the Gasworks. Although he had left, to his great joy, he did not appear anxious to begin his week's holiday, but sat all that morning in Hall with them, talking about old times.

"I'll keep my nature diary as usual, Willie," he said, "and you'll keep yours, won't you? Then when we see each other, we can exchange, just like old times, can't we? And don't forget the meeting of the Owl Club this year, will you? Rupert and Jack, and me and you, and perhaps Mac. I'll bring some grub."

Willie assured him that he would not forget. They were having a general conversation when Mr. Rore peered from the Va class-room, and his admonition reverberated through Big Hall. Every head bent over ephemeral work. The Head Master inquired the meaning of Bony's presence, and told him to go home. With the dread eyes upon him, Bony rose, collected his pens and books, and shuffled away into 3b class-room to gather the remnant.

"What are you doing, sah?" the stentorian voice asked as Dove jumped up and shook Bony's hand. The other Specials looked up covertly, admiring the bold Dove.

"I was saying good-bye, Sir," replied the Irish boy, as Mr. Rore floated swiftly to them.

"I beg your pardon" replied the Head Master, inclining his head courteously. "It is most natural. Watson is going to face life. Remember, boys, that there are sharks and tigers in the world. Watson, I wish you all success. It will come only through work. Hard, unceasing work!"

"Crawling up the gaspipes after escaped tar!" whispered Effish, but Mr. Rore did not hear.

He shook hands, for the second time, with Watson, and awkwardly the others rose and bade him good-bye.

"Was it not Catallus who expressed the emotion of farewell in immortal verse?" exclaimed Mr. Rore. "You will recall—

*Accipe fraterno multum manantia fletu
atque in perpetuum, frater, ave atque vale!*

"Now then, boys, you have a week or two left. Make the most of it. No preparation can be too thorough. All the world's great deeds were wrought by constant effort. Even genius is nothing—a shooting star—without constant labour to keep the mind taut and healthy. Remember the parable of the buried talents. *By the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread!* That is an ancient allegorical embodiment of a great truth. Now on with your work, master your difficulties—through work shall ye find happiness!"

He turned and floated away under the horizontal bar, and so into his class-room, the loose grating giving all within a second's grace to bow their heads in silence.

Bony appeared a disconsolate figure at the main gate after morning school, explaining carelessly that he happened to be passing. He said that it was fine to have left school. He was there, a lonely figure, again at half-past four, and this time he had discarded his black cap and silver badge, and wore instead an enormous check cap, under which he appeared lost. When Willie, emerging from Hall door, saw him standing outside the gate, he did not recognise him at first. A few minutes later the Specials had gathered round him, now smoking a cigarette. The appearance of Mr. Kenneth in the playground, however, caused the cap to be hidden and the cigarette to be thrown away. Bony looked quite nervous.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE BATTLE

INTERMITTENTLY Willie had been discussing the Big Battle to be fought at the end of term, and every one had been interested; but the organisation had appeared so vast that

its action seemed impossible. With only a week to go before the school closed, the idea became an obsession. He must appear as a colossal hero before he left. A new challenge was sent to Clemow and Hoys, drawn up by Yeates who had a gift in that direction. The parchment claimed that Maddison and Temperley were finer fighters, athletes, observers, trappers and woodcraftsmen than Clemow and Hoys. It hinted that Clemow and Hoys were frightened to meet them in pitched battle. It suggested that to retain their manhood they must gather together a band of warriors, choose a fortress, and fight.

After school the followers of Willie gathered round the fives court, where a game was in progress, and pelted them with books, old gym shoes, and orange peel. Hoys emerged angrily and had a brief wrestle with Jack, while Willie and Clemow bristled at each other. Encouraging cheers and counter-cheers attracted a considerable crowd. More boys joined the surging mass, encouraging with shouts and taunts.

"Give him a lift under the lug, young Temperley!"

"Go on, Jack, don't funk it. Lam him!"

"Slip him the sleep-pill in your right mit, Archibald!"

"Look, Hoys has got a nose-bleeder!"

"Temperley's right peeper is closing!"

"Look here, young Temperley," said Hoys condescendingly, when the scrimmage had terminated, "I've had enough of your lip, and more than enough of Mad Willie's. I know you think you're both pretty hot stuff, but I think you're both merely silly. As for the band of bobtails you call your Army, we will raise a crowd that will expurgate you entirely."

This calm and lofty speech was cheered by half a hundred boys, and some began to shout, "I'm on your side, Maddison," "Me for Clemow and Hoys," "Let's pick sides now."

Which was done. Thereafter for the next two days immense excitement hovered about the senior form rooms. From the rank of Captain, Hoys and Willie promoted themselves to Colonel, thence by rapid steps to Field-Marshal. The Army Commanders being in the Specials there was every opportunity for making plans, discussing the situation, and

so enthusiasm grew and grew. In Lower School a Battle was also planned, and many engagements and skirmishes took place in the wash-houses, the lavatory, and the lower playground. Little boys came to school with wooden swords hidden down their knickers, stones in pockets, catapults, pea-shooters, and hastily made life preservers. Some brought masks, but they did not keep them long. Two of the windows of Mr. Worth's woodwork shop were broken by catapult stones; and during luncheon hours several bold boys climbed on the roof and waged guerilla warfare among the chimney stacks and skylights. One afternoon Mr. Rore was astounded, upon entering his study at five minutes to two, to find a dirty old sack containing clay lying in his fireplace. Winkle major had hidden his gang's store of ammunition on a chimney pot, and it had dropped down.

The Battle was to take place on the afternoon of the day before breaking-up, a Wednesday. Mr. Beach on luncheon-duty during Tuesday could hardly keep order. After luncheon mysterious bands of boys roamed about Hall, seizing isolated boys, and bearing them mysteriously away. Creeping Sam the porter was kept very busy, but every one, bold at the term's end, defied him.

Throughout the various skirmishings Willie and Hoys, as befitted their high rank, maintained an attitude of punctilious aloofness. Whenever one or the other was appealed to (for all fists were forbidden) to adjudicate in a matter touching on the War, he would reply sternly that all such skirmishings were unofficial. There was a truce, he affirmed, lasting till three o'clock on Wednesday. By that time the rival armies of nearly three hundred boys would be encamped in the great beech forest near Rookhurst; and until then the men were to behave themselves.

On Tuesday night Willie and Jack, accompanied by Bony who had heard of the Battle and obtained permission from his Works Manager—"an awfully ripping chap"—his friend Bryers, Charlie Cerr-Nore, Yeates, and Macarthy went along the footpath of the big wheatfield, whence was a fine vantage point to reconnoitre the land.

"Bill Nye can be our spy," exclaimed Willie, as they

approached the spinney through the grain and crimson poppies, "and I'm placing all my hopes of success on strategy." Beyond this general idea Willie's plans had not formulated. "We've got to take their camp, destroy it, capture the leaders, bind 'em, and smoke 'em in our fire of triumph. Shall us?"

"Rather," they agreed.

"I'd like to smoke John Fry in a fire," went on Willie irrelevantly. "You know, Bony, that swine that I told you of, blinding the chaffbobs. I haven't seen him lately."

"I have," the tall boy answered. "I saw him the other night in a pub near Crawley's boatyard. I just called in for a pick-me-up, you know. He was pretty drunk, too, with Lazy Liz holding him up."

"And he preaches against drink!" said Jack..

"I shall never take to drink and women," affirmed Willie. "I think they must both be beastly. I mean the sort of woman like Lazy Lizzie."

"Girls are all right," suggested Charlie Cerr-Nore with a smirk, "they like a chap to cuddle 'em up sometimes. Don't they, Willie?"

"I dunno," mumbled Willie, hating Charlie. "I say, I wonder if Bill Nye's at home. I don't hear Tiger barking."

"What a ripping place," murmured Yeates, "and a spiffing shelter. Look at that old rail, and the brown patch under it where the rust has dropped. I bet it's ancient."

"Oh, rather! I've known it since I was seven," Willie told him.

Bill Nye was nowhere to be seen. The spinney seemed to be a place of abandonment, with its dry shelter filled with bracken and rotted sacks, and gnawn bones. On its domed roof rose-bay flowers were in bloom.

"There's been no fire for two days," announced Jack, "because it rained the night before last and the ashes are flattened by the drops."

"Hi, here's a trophy," called the excited voice of Macarthy from the shelter.

He crawled out with the flintlock gun, excitedly waving his find.

"Look," said Willie, "the trigger has got a little orange rust on it. Bill Nye hasn't been here lately. I wonder if he's bunked?"

"We must have him as a spy," urged Bony. "Where does he live?"

"In here. His Granmer won't have him in old Bob's cottage in the wood. Shame, I call it, because he isn't a bad chap if you understand him. You can tell that by the way he loves his dog."

Charlie had climbed a dwarfed hornbeam, and called out that it was a fine place for observation. Jack and Rupert made a fire, and they all sat round it, smoking cigarettes, with the exception of Bony, who slowly filled a large pipe with a highly varnished bowl.

"It's not such a dusty pipe," he told them, "and I like a big bowl because it's a cooler smoke. We all smoke this kind at the Gasworks." He wasted half a box of matches in vain efforts to light it, and then, announcing that the tobacco was packed too tightly, he tapped it out and repacked it. Still it would not ignite, and Cerr-Nore said that it was no wonder that they all smoked that kind of pipe at the Gasworks.

"There wouldn't be much danger of an explosion, would there?"

Bony ignored the comment, and Charlie went on:

"Or perhaps it's the sort of pipe they make the coke in, is it? I've heard Cook say she can never get it to burn."

"We make the best coke round about here, and don't you forget it, Cerr-Nore!" rejoined Bony.

"And what you make on the swings you lose on the roundabouts, what? Have I guessed your secret? The gas is pretty poor muck, ain't it? It stinks like Sulphuretted Hydrogen!"

"Well, if you knew anything about it, you'd know that all coal gas contains an unstable amount of H_2S ."

"Your beastly gasworks stink as bad as a stable."

"Oh, shut up," the others groaned, "stop that gassing. You're like Taffy trying to be smart with a kid in 2c."

Cerr-Nore started playing with a stick, and Bony at

last managed to induce a red glow in the pipe. He coughed a lot, because it was a new pipe, he stated. Yeates, an expert in pipes, said that it stank like a school luncheon, probably because it was half putty. It required such a lot of blowing instead of sucking to keep it alight that finally Bony, eulogising the brand of tobacco, tapped it out on his boot and in doing so accidentally snapped the bowl from the imitation vulcanite mouthpiece. He threw it in the fire, and watched dolefully its slow incineration.

They talked till the evening sun gave a golden outline to the trees, and then went slowly down the pathway to the gate against which leant their bicycles. There they spoke awhile about the Battle, the lovely evening, and those summers of boyhood that had fled so swiftly. They agreed to write to one another, and of course, all would join the Old Boys Club.

"But term isn't over yet," Willie told them.

"We'll see each other to-morrow and the next day, won't we?" said Bryers hopefully.

"Oh, rather," they agreed.

Bony looked rather glum, and in the evening stillness the others rode away, leaving Jack and Willie together, looking on the ground. They did not speak much as they meandered homewards.

THE SHAMED DEFEAT

HIS army was demoralised, of that there could be no doubt. The organisation of the despised Clemow and Hoys had been superior. They had anticipated his own plan, meeting a cunning feint-attack with a feint-attack more cunning, and successful. Moreover, as he ran to the lake with his Standard, all that was left of a proud ambition, Willie felt certain that Cerr-Nore had been a traitor. Had he not cleared off early in the Battle, without orders, and not returned? He must have gone to a secret meeting-place and divulged the plans of attack when the line of skirmishers had been thrown out, and the advance body departed: when it was too late to change the plan of attack.

And now he was being pursued—he, the leader, the Field-Marshal, was running away with the Standard. That, at least, would not be captured. He would take the catamaran and bear it across the lake to Heron's Plume Island, and there light a huge beacon fire. Let them follow him there, if they could!

Jack was a prisoner, taken by surprise and bound with a rope after a great fight. It might have been a case of fists, and he and Hoys were equally strong; but Hoys had ordered his bodyguard to overwhelm him, crying that it was undignified for a Marshal to fight one of lower rank. Only a determination to prevent an utter defeat, which his own capture would have completed, had prevented his rushing into the fray. Bony and Bryers, Yeates and Burrell, his loyal Main General Headquarters Staff, where were they?

Willie ran on. Sometimes he paused, and listened for sounds of pursuit. It was getting late: it might be eight o'clock. Only the thumping of his own heart and the swift breaths could he hear. He would rest for a little time on the dried beech leaves. If only he could have a drink!

For a minute he sat there, his head between his knees. A wood pigeon with cleaving wings passed overhead, saw him, and clattered away. It had come from the direction in which Willie had been going, from the lake. Alarmed,

the retreating Field-Marshal looked up, rose to his feet, and darted behind the bole of a dead beech-tree.

Some one was coming along, but he dared not expose himself ; he feared that if he shifted his feet a twig would crack and he would be betrayed.

The footsteps came nearer, and then he heard a whistle. A sharp bark answered, followed by a stir of leaves. Willie's heart seemed to cease its thudding, then beat in a frenzy of emotion, his throat grew hot and dry, and his wrists weak. He tried to make himself walk from behind the tree, but he could not. And all the while the footfalls came nearer.

Willie had forgotten about the Battle, his lost honour, the Standard to be burnt on Heron's Plume Island, the treachery of Charlie Cerr-Nore. He simply stood behind the mouldered beech bole and waited for his heart to stop its foolish beating.

An increased noise of pads among the leaves. He looked down into the face of a dog that was staring up into his own and wagging its tail.

"Go away," ordered Willie, but the dog barked sharply, twice. A girl's voice answered, and realising that he could no longer be concealed, Willie came from behind the tree.

"Hallo, Willie," the girl greeted him, smiling. She stood on the pathway, feet wide apart, and hands on her hips.

"Hallo, Elsie," he mumbled, then glanced quickly at her eyes.

She was changed. Surely the girl standing on the slope above him, of whose presence in Rookhurst he had not known till then, was not the girl who had left a year ago for Belgium. She was taller and bigger altogether, her skirt was half-way between her knees and ankles, she was some one he did not know. Again he looked up into her face, at her large blue eyes, so beautiful, and her radiant cheeks. In her gaze was no timidity, he noticed miserably, no shyness, but just happiness and friendliness.

Elsie sat down on the slope of the wood, arranged her skirt about her knees, and patted the ground in invitation beside her.

Willie, hesitating a moment first, also sat down, holding

the Standard under his coat. A giant tree hid the approach from the lake.

"You've grown, Willie. You're quite tall now. I only came back this afternoon."

"You've changed, too," he stammered.

Blackberry, the dog, was routing in the leaves, watched by a robin with its head on one side. A voice came from among the trees.

"Elsie. El-sie! Where are you?"

"Here, Jo!" yelled Elsie, "sitting down on a bank. Hurry up. Guess who's here?"

"Mary's stopping with me," she said to Willie, who felt a sudden and terrible depression in his lower self. Elsie didn't care about him, he had to go to London: she had got that girl Mary Ogilvie with her. Had she cared, surely she would have spent a week with him alone? Everything was ended: he would go to the Island and never see any one again.

"I've had such fun," the gentle voice called, "a lovely squirrel was dodging me round a little tree.' The voice came nearer. "I peered round, and it did the same, then bounded off into the treetops. I saw some boys making a fire down by the lake. I wonder if Willie——"

The voice ceased as the girl saw them. Mary stood still, looking at the boy. Her hands moved nervously, her eyes, brown as a wallflower, seemed to grow larger and softer, the hue of bramble blossom tinted her cheeks. She wore no hat, just a plain white blouse and a rough blue serge skirt, and shoes without stockings; her figure was gracile like a budding snowdrop of spring.

"Hallo, Willie," she said, almost to herself.

"Hallo," he replied, standing up and shaking her hand limply. Then he looked away.

"Hasn't he grown big!" exclaimed Elsie, in the tone of a mother speaking of a favourite child.

Mary nodded, eagerly. A silken fillet was around her brow, and binding her hair which was long and dark. In one lustrous tress a brown beech-leaf had become tangled. Her spirit seemed loth to remain in her body, desiring to

dance away like the captive leaf that stirred with the wind in her hair.

Willie's disappointment was like a boulder oppressing his heart. He saw nothing of the joy of Mary.

"Sit down Jo darling," invited the other girl. "Now then, Willie, tell us how you have been getting on. We were going over to Skirr Farin to-morrow morning, to see you and all the others, weren't we, Mary? Come home to supper now, will you? Mummie and Daddy would love to see you. Let's call for Jack, and Peggy and Doris. Hallo, there's some one coming!"

Willie looked round quickly for a place to hide in. He was seen, however, and Yeates voice called, "Here he is. Come on, chaps."

"We're having a Battle," Willie told Elsie. "I'm Field-Marshal."

The others came up. Cerr-Nore, Macarthy, Bryers, and Bony.

"Why, what's up?" inquired Yeates, as though the fact that his Marshal—for whose rescue he was leading a hastily organised Legion of Death—sitting with two girls, was something incredible.

"Hallo, Charlie," greeted Elsie.

"Hallo," he answered. The other boys stood a little way off, not knowing what to do.

"Excuse me," said Yeates, "but how about it, Field Marshal?"

"We've lost," Willie muttered.

"We haven't," blazed Yeates, "we've captured their camp. They got ours, certainly, but *we* aren't going to give in. I'm sorry, Sir, if we've disturbed you in any way. It may interest you to know that Colonel Pigface here pinched their Standard all on his own, and led the main body of the enemy in a hue and cry after him. We've got their stores, and everything. Now we're going to raid their camp—our camp, I mean—and get Temperley." Then slowly and dispassionately he added, "I'm sorry our Field-Marshal is a funk." Yeates's father was a soldier. "So we'll put him on the half-pay list, shall we, chaps?"

"With girls!" snorted Colonel Pigface.

"I'm Marshal," cried Willie. "I've got the Standard."

Yeates and he clenched their fists, and advanced towards each other. Yeates then put his hands behind his back, and very white in the face, said "Strike me, Field-Marshal! I shall not hit back."

"I shan't hit any one," muttered Willie, "and don't chew suckers, especially that cheap American muck, when you speak to me!"

"Well, come on, chaps," said Yeates, turning to the others, "we must get on. As long as we know, Maddison, where we are, it's all right."

The others seemed not anxious to go. Rupert and Bony lingered and looked at Willie, as though urging him voicelessly to explain and join them again. But Willie did not move. He would let them misjudge him. He was humiliated, and before the eyes of Elsie.

"Come on, chaps," repeated Yeates, "don't forget old Jack."

"One minute," murmured Willie. "Adjutant-General, I was saving the Standard. I thought it was utter defeat. I was going to save it, at any rate."

"And your own skin. Come on, chaps."

"Wait a minute. Brigadier-General Bony, do you think me a coward?"

Bony looked on the ground. Cerr-Nore walked away.

"Rupert," pleaded Willie, "do you?"

"I don't think you are," faltered Rupert, the Quartermaster-General, a little sadly. There was a slight noise from Mary. Elsie looked puzzled. Mary's face never looked from that of the disgraced leader.

The others went away.

"Good-bye," said Willie to the girls.

"But where are you going? Why have you quarrelled?" demanded Elsie. "What is it all about?"

"It's ended. Good-bye," he almost groaned, and turned away towards the lake. Mary ran swiftly after him. Her hand touched his sleeve, light as a fairy's.

"Willie," she breathed, "I believe in you."

“ I’ll—I’ll——’

He could say no more. He turned away, and went swiftly towards the lake, his throat and eyes dry and scalded. He had nearly reached the old boathouse when the hostile party by the lake saw him, four hundred yards away, and gave a shout. Willie waved the Standard in reckless defiance, and rushed down the pathway. He knew that he could elude them, but he wished to reach Heron’s Plume Island unobserved. There he would set fire to the hut that he and Jack had made, and the light of the beacon would draw all to the shores. But he would not recross over to them : he would stay there with the ashes of the Standard.

The pursuers came swiftly on. They were gaining on him. It would be fatal to go towards the lake now. He turned to the right and fled among the tall beech trees, blackbirds shrilling their alarms before him ; once a cock pheasant with grating cries rocketted up from beneath his feet.

He came to another mossy path, and ran along it. Just in front of him was the root-cave that he and Jack had discovered a few weeks ago. He turned round ; no one was to be seen.

On his hands and knees Willie crept forward into the darkness made more absolute by far chinks of daylight. He paused to hear the beating of his heart. Something stirred in front, and he kept still, suddenly frightened. It might have been a badger, driven from its holt by one of the Colham Badger Club digs. Willie had seen terriers bitten by badgers during a dig : once, listening at the entrance of a hole, he had heard the munching of a terrier’s bones. A little cold shiver ran up his back and twitched his hair.

There was a sound of deep, sighful breathing. Willie stopped. Then a sharp bark : instinctively he shielded his face with his hands, believing that he had disturbed a vixen to earth with her cubs. Something barked again, sniffed his hands : instantly his body was wet with terror : the something licked his face and whined joyfully.

“ It’s Tiger,” he burst out, and the dog yelped and sprung at his face. Willie struck a match, and lit a candle stump. The flame sunk, and he waited for the grease to creep

up the wick. The dog Tiger was making ecstatic noises in its throat, and its long tail was thumping against a root.

Willie went on. The deep restless breathing seemed nearer, the candle flickered, a sighing seemed to fill the gloomed gold of the cavern: Willie heard a wheezy coughing, pitiful and weak, like the feeble croaking of a little crow caught in a trap. Then he saw that Bill Nye was lying almost before him, with the dog Tiger pawing frantically at his ragged coat, and caressing the thin peaky face with its tongue. Bill Nye wheezed again, and rolled on his side, the dog moaned in anguish. The eyes of the woodland starveling were like two black bubbles in a wasted face; his right hand clawed the air, coming to rest, a hot and dry paw, on Willie's cheek.

"What's the matter, Bill Nye, what's the matter?" whispered Willie, "are you ill, poor Bill Nye. Ah! that's why you weren't in the spinney. Don't die, Bill Nye, don't die," he encouraged wildly. "I'll go and get help. All right, Tiger, don't lick my face. Bill Nye, can't you answer me? It's me, Willie Maddison. Lie down, Tiger, you silly dog. I won't hurt you, Bill Nye. You've got fever. I'll go and tell Dolly and Tom Sorrell, and they'll fetch you into the quairey cottage, in a warm blanket. Can't you answer, Bill Nye? Your dog is a skeleton, too. How many days have you two been in here?"

Willie gabbled on, all coherent ideas gone at the sight of the crowstarver's emaciated face, with those eyes so mazed, and that parched, pitiful claw of a hand. Tiger seemed mad with happiness.

Willie blew out the candle and shuffled backwards from the cave. Outside the light was too bright for a moment, but swiftly he ran towards the quarry. It was nearly a mile away. Five minutes after leaving Bill Nye a small band of the enemy gave sudden chase, and he fell sprawling over a stone in a narrow gully. They pounced upon him, and he fought with the abandon of despair, not for the Standard, but for the freedom to continue his journey. He kicked and bit, until Beckelt gave him a punch on the nose that dazed him. Then they sat on his stomach and chest, after which

they bumped him, because he had behaved, they said, like a "filthy tick in a Board School."

Eventually they tired of this.

"We'll keep Mad Willie all night," crowed Beckelt, who appeared to be the leader of the rapscallion gang, "tied up to a tree. Cor, he didn't half give me a hack on the ankle! Yes, Field-Marshal Maddison, we're camping out all night. And when you speak to me, call me the Generalissimo of the Irregulars. Beckelt's Light Horse, my boy. We've split with Clemow and Hoys. Ha, Beckelt and Effish are the boys."

Effish appeared at this moment, with a teapot, a kettle, three loaves of bread, and some eggs.

"Here we are," he said in a deep oily voice, "got 'em from a witch in the wood, over there—funny old woman with a bald head and a complexion like an overloaded flypaper."

"Granmer Nye," said Willie.

"Be quiet," ordered Effish, "or I shall spit in your eye and choke you. Cost me two bob, boys. Regular old rooker, that geyser."

"Listen to me," began Willie, "I've found a boy in the woods who's ill with fever. I want to get help. Let me up, you fools."

"Ha, ha," jeered Beckelt, "we *don't* think! Can you see any green in our eyes? Perhaps you'd like us to untie you and let you fetch help, eh?"

"Yes, you fool," hissed Willie. "I tell you the chap's dying. He was to be our spy, but we couldn't find him last night."

"Laugh at him!" mocked Effish, "laugh at him, chaps. Pretty bit of cunning, eh, of the Stone Age variety. You know, when they wanted to drop a gentle hint for a chap to go at afternoon tea they dropped a ton brick on his nut! Think again, Mad Willie."

"You filthy little sheep-tick," raged Willie, "with your bulging, snailey eyes. Dirty swine, let me get up, and I'll give you Stone Age."

"Shut up," said Effish, bringing a burning faggot from the fire and holding it near Willie's forehead.

"Look out, a spark will blind me, you fool."

"Apologise!"

"Carrambo—a curse on you!"

"Admit you're defeated by Effish's Irregulars!"

"Beckelt's Horse," cried the thin wiry leader of the rapscallions.

"Pah! Flea and Bug Brigade!"

"Very well," said Effish, not at all out of temper, "you will have nothing to drink till to-morrow."

"No, shut up, you fellows," cried Willie. "Honest now, there is a chap ill in the wood. I just found him. I want to get help."

"Oh, drop it, Weary Willie."

"Look here," urged the captive, "why not lead me to where I can get help. I swear it's all right. Don't keep me here all night. The chap will die. You come with me!"

"Yes, and you lead us into a nice trap, eh? We *don't* think. We weren't born yesterday."

"Look here, I'll give you the Standard to show you caught me. It's in my outside coat pocket. Take it out. You can easily put it on another stick. There now, you've won."

"Thanks for the Standard, but we've got you as well. Beckelt's Light Horse captured the famous General Scarecrow. One in the eye for Hoys, eh? Alone we did it."

"Look here," pleaded Willie, "you chaps will be awfully sorry later on. Can't I do anything to make you believe me?" His voice broke.

"Look, the Commander-in-Chief is nearly blubbering," jeered Beckelt in glee.

"Sign away your birthright, will you?" demanded Effish.

"What do you mean?"

"That's the idea!" chuckled Effish. "We'll let you go if you sign away the freedom of your Army."

"What an idea. Cor! What an idea," whistled the brainless Beckelt.

"I'll sign anything you like, if you let me go free," begged Willie, with a simulation of eagerness.

"You'll sign the surrender of your Army to us?" said Effish.

"Yes, if you let me go."

Effish was fumbling for paper and pencil, when with a hoarse shout several boys burst through the bushes above, and slid down the shale. More appeared behind, led by Yeates, Bony, Jack, and Macarthy.

"Come on," roared Yeates, "no quarter!"

Effish and Beckelt immediately rushed away, followed by the little rapscaillon band of Irregulars. Yeates pounced upon the basket of eggs, and with a shout of joy started to bombard the routed foe. Effish was the only one hit, and he stopped an egg with the bulging back of his head that spread over his cap and hair like tawdry yellow curls of a pantomime wig.

"Let 'em rip," ordered Yeates.

He stooped and cut the string that bound Willie's ankles and wrists.

"So you were going to sign away the Army, were you?"

"For my own reasons, yes."

"Maddison," said Yeates, speaking with deliberate and icy rage, "you are an outsider. They say that events test a chap's guts. You are gutless. What do you say, chaps?"

The others came round mumbling. Jack's voice seemed scarcely to hide his hurt as he said:

"Don't be too hard on him, chaps."

"What the hell has it got to do with you?" blazed Willie, turning on him.

"Everything," answered Jack, "because you're my friend. You're still my friend, but——"

"What?"

Jack turned away.

"But what?"

Jack shook his head.

Willie went to him.

"Listen, Jack," he said quietly, "this is a great moment. Either you stand by me now, or we split friendship. I had a reason!"

"Saving the Standard!" sneered Yeates.

"Be quiet, you gum-gollop devils! I'm talking to Temperley. But why should I explain to any one? You can all desert me. You are all deprived of your commissions. I'm off."

He flung away, but Jack caught him round the waist. "Not so fast, Willie," he said grimly, "this hasn't begun yet. I'm not going to let you hurt yourself. I know there's a reason. Out with it!"

"You low cad," screamed Willie, tears in his eyes, "let me go. I'm going to fetch some one. Mind your own business you! You condemn me, so I'll say nothing. Let me go, let me go, let me go, let me go."

"I shan't," grunted Jack, holding his struggling friend. "You know I'll stick by you. Tell us, there's a decent chap," he added, releasing him. But Willie, white in the face, sprang at him and hit him savagely on the mouth, several times.

"A fight," the others yelled.

"Come on!" Willie's voice quavered. He clenched his fists.

"Go on, mop him up, Jack," urged Yeates.

But to their surprise, Jack stood still. His face was bleeding. Yeates and his friends stared, waiting.

Jack's mouth opened, as though he would speak. He looked at Willie, his lips quivered. Again he seemed about to speak, but hesitated, then swung away into the wood.

"Come on, chaps," said Yeates, "leave him."

So Willie was left alone, an outcast from his friends, remorse like a burn in his heart. But all at once he remembered Bill Nye, and made swiftly for the quarry and Tom Sorrell.

VISION BY THE WATERPLAY

ALL that day Dolly had been molested by a vague apprehension. Often she felt like this—a heavy feeling within her, when the present was wearisome, and the future—at rarer intervals now did she look forward to a future when she would be happy—a grayness. She had no relatives who cared about her. Her father was dead, and buried in a pauper's grave in the cemetery attached to the Grubber. She had no one. Old Bob Lewis she was fond of, but throughout the seasons he sat in his chair, and mused. In winter he was troubled, because he could not sit outside in the sunlight that he loved. Granmer Nye Dolly hated as a nasty, cruel old woman, who would not die, but grumbled always and ever. To her accusations and complaints she was indifferent, but the cumulative effect wore her. Granmer Nye habitually accused Dolly of wearing her boots—large misshapen things that resembled crushed cockroaches. She screamed at the girl for washing Bob Lewis's sheets and pillow-slip once a week instead of once or twice in a year, as her own were, saying that soon they would be scrubbed threadbare. She screamed if a window were opened, or when Bob went and stood by the door. "Ye girt dawbake, ye be staling granmer's tarnip wine, you. Staling from poor old 'ooman 'oom's teeth wor brukken dwenty vor year ago, you. Master grawbey! The Lard'll take ee into fire and darkness everlastin', you. Naw then, Barb Loos, closen that door, wull ee. Lattin' in they windiblores, thou girt loobey." The tirade of this ancient scold usually included obscene words that had been learnt in childhood from her father and mother.

Granmer Nye in her married life had brought forth seventeen children. Four of them had died before reaching the age of six months. Two had been born slaverers, and the other woman had not failed to remind her of this during a quarrel (she had been a black-haired, thin-lipped shrew, very strong and able to drink quarts of ale during reaping without getting even mazed-drunk). At the age of seventy Aholibah Nye had driven the life out of her husband, and

was possessed of forty-seven grandchildren. Most of these were living in the neighbourhood, and carrying on the traditions of the family among themselves. Another branch of the family, the Caws, inhabited nearly all the cottages in the adjoining hamlet of Snedlebarum, but most of the males were roamers, becoming soldiers, or going to Wintersea to work in the docks. The Caws of Snedlebarum had produced one family genius, a red-haired girl named Eve, who by her beauty and charm had caused many of the village youths to quarrel violently. She had been, in her early childhood, painted by Mr. Norman. Generally the Caws and the Nyes despised one another, but rarely had any sort of encounter.

Aholibah Nye's favourite son, the one who in childhood she beat the least, had been a steady worker, and at the age of thirty-five he possessed nine acres which he sowed and reaped himself, seven pigs, and a cottage. Till this time he had cared nothing for women, but one day he had fallen in love. This state was entirely responsible for a sudden love of music, and his marriage six months later. A female child was born in due course, and from that time onwards his wife and himself had drifted slowly apart. Farmer Nye found consolation in his musical instruments. Tiring of the zither and the concertina, which reminded him of his happy courting days, he purchased from a wandering tinker a battered hautboy, but from this he could produce only unpleasant noises. Having a theory that stringed instruments were more melodious than wind instruments, he purchased a gittern, but this was not satisfying, so he exchanged it for a rebeck. This in turn wearied him, and he obtained a therbo. The therbo was displeasing after the novelty of its appearance had worn off. Returning to wind instruments, he spent a considerable amount of his savings upon a contrafagotto, which he abandoned for a tuba. The tuba was found broken when he had had it two days; he and his wife had a little quarrel over it. Soon afterwards she died of small-pox, and he became a remorseful man.

His last tune was played upon a bombardon, after which he took violently to drink. One morning, after a slight frost, his feet were found sticking out of a deep muddy pond near

the blacksmith's forge. Besides the small field, the livestock, the cottage, and the musical instruments, he left behind a pretty daughter, called Ruth. Ruth was rather a careless hussy, dreamy and soft-hearted, and in love with a woodman named Job Ley. Her grandmother had moved into the cottage, and taken charge of the land. Ruth was made to do the work of a labourer, her grandmother helping with the reaping and sowing, but killing and emptying the pigs herself. When she was sixteen, Ruth, returning with some village maids from dipping in the pool, had been selected by a big labourer named Cog to receive his crude attempts at love-making. The maids had run away, laughing, but thereafter he hung about for her, and one night he caught her. She feared to tell any one. Six months later her sweetheart, hearing screams coming from the cottage, had gone in and found Aholibah Nye thrashing Ruth with a stick. On hearing the reason he ceased to speak to her. Ruth thereafter was a changed girl. The child nearly died in infancy, and from its birth she did not love it. She could not bear to see it; it never cried, but stared at the smoky ceiling when not sleeping. Job Ley fought with the labourer Cog and broke his nose and one of his eyes: then rapidly spent all his savings in the Cat and Gnatfly—he would not wed maid, widow, or drotchel, he declared. Ruth, wilting like a flower uprooted, hid her misery in Colham, where her end was swiftly inevitable. And so Bill Nye grew up, knowing no love; Granmer Nye sold her dead granddaughter's property and went to live with her nephew Bob Lewis.

Nowadays in Goldfinch Cottage there was little tranquillity. The calm that Bob by his life's work had merited was rarely his. When Granmer shrilled at him he never answered. The old folks depressed Dolly, in whom the fires of youth were ever ready to blow into flaming. Perhaps in another atmosphere she would have cast long ago her brooding, and taken a lover. Many times had her heart joyed as she set out to walk to the quarry, to see the solitary Tom Sorrell, but on meeting him it had passed—as though between them had come something that broke all feeling for Tom, as a

guard subdues the reflection of a fire on metal. The kiln-tender in absence had her affection but not her love; when present she remembered Jim and the guard was immovable.

"Where be ee a-goin," demanded Granmer Nye after tea. "Out gallivanting to make a vool of zum veller? Us doan't pay ee dree shillun a month fur to do naught. Answer, wull ee, thou drumbling servant-wench? What fur be ee a-goin out, to make a vool of Jan Vry?"

"Aiy, praper fule should be, reckons, to listen to the likes of he, ould ooman. Jan Fry be no cop, noomye!"

"Dratchel!" screamed Granmer Nye, "dratchel, blaspheming on th' Lard's chosen. Barb Loos, has ee heard on th' likes o' that afore? Can ee mind th' like on this yer maid?"

"Oo ah," mumbled the old keeper, nodding his head, "th' little maid do like sunshine, surelye. Praaper, midear, praaper maid er be."

"You'm mazed," spat Mrs. Nye, cleeting her gums and oscillating her head like a blind worm seeking a fly on a stone.

Bob mumbled again, scratched his head, and slowly rose from the chair. "Look at taters," he muttered, and passed out of the door, followed by Dolly.

"Would ee like ees chair?" asked Dolly.

"Noomye!" answered Bob, "doan't ee worrit on anything. Nunno, nunno. Taters want drop o' rain, nice drop o' rain. Aiy."

"Gudebye, Granfer," said Dolly.

"Gudebye, midear, gudebye. Lill maids were made to enjoy theirselves. Ee be so melan-choly, do ee see now. What fur should a bootiful maid like ee 'pear so melan-choly? Can ee ahear goldyspinks callin, now? They never be melan-choly. Listen on what I be a-telling now. I can tell ee why they be so happy. Aiy, goldyspinks, goldyspinks. Every moment be occu-pied, and in the sunlight. Allus in the bootiful sweet air. Listen on what I be a-telling ee. I knows it for sure. Well, gudebye, midear, gudebye. Mind what I've a-told ee. I doan't read no books."

Dolly went away, and wandered along the sward of the

path through the pine wood. Not far from the cottage she heard a shrill chattering, coming from a high tree rising from bracken that reared in rusty waves at the base of its brown straightness. A bird swooped away, a hen sparrow-hawk that a few years before, when Bob was about, would not have raised a brood there. When five minutes afterwards Dolly met the swart and stocky and single-worded keeper, she said nothing about it, feeling a protective interest in the nest. He grinned, showing his strong yellow teeth, and passed her without saying anything. Nor did Dolly speak. His woman, a jealous, dusky creature with a stone kitchen-floor seemingly alive with young children and babies playing with blackened pots and rabbits' skins, she knew to dislike her; for was she herself not a woman who drew all men's eyes by a glance or a word? Not so with the other—an ugly slattern with a shrill voice. After passing, the keeper looked round, and cut at a wasp with his hazel wand, but Dolly went on her way.

She passed an oak tree on whose lichened lower branches dangled the greenish carcasses of stoats and weasels, some new and food for flies, others stiff and dry, hairless, and all with fangs exposed in a grin of rage. She remembered how once she had discovered Willie with a sack, cutting down some corpses: furtively he had told her that he was making a fur coat. How long ago that was, how many lonely summers had come and gone since she had been at Skirr Farm, in the room over whose coved ceiling at night the white owlets had worried their food, and the old birds had screamed as they sailed past her lattice. On the sill she used to lean her elbows, watching the far spinney dark against the sky, yearning to be where a twinkling speckle of red in the dusk was Jim's fire. If only the night would bring again the well-remembered whistle, if only he were there so that she could embrace him: before, she had been young and half-afraid: now she would love him and bind him to her for ever. Dolly sighed, and noticed that some Grammar School boys were in the beech wood, and coming towards her.

She heard one urge, a tall youth with a pale face,—

“Go on, you ask.”

“No, you, man!”

"It may be a cunning disguise," said another.

The tall boy with a pale face approached and demanded in a faltering voice:—

"Halt, who goes there. Oh, rot, you chaps, it's no one."

"Go on, Yeates!"

"Excuse me," went on the nervous boy, "but what's your name? I know it sounds silly, but we're having a—field day, you know. When we spotted you, we thought you might be a spy. Sorry, really, for the mistake," and he turned away, looking palely hot in the face.

"Be Will'um Madd'zun wi' you?" asked Dolly.

"Yes," replied the leader, "but why do you ask?"

"This be his battle?"

"Yes," replied Yeates suspiciously, "have you seen him?"

"It's all right, Yeates," said a smaller boy, with a delicate face. "I know who it is."

"Oh, I'm sorry," mumbled Yeates, half raising his cap, "come on, you chaps."

Dolly saw them closing round the smaller boy, who, glancing over his shoulder to see if the woman were near, began to talk quietly to them. As she walked away they all turned round and stared.

Dolly wandered in the wood, hearing sometimes the distant shout of boys. On her faded jacket the windswayed beeches wrought from shadow and sunlight a design hued of iron and gold, soft and ever changing; the leaves of thin beaten copper whispered at her passing. She did not notice the two girls who sat on a mossy bank above a dead tree till she was near them.

"Arternoon, Miss Ulsey," she murmured, pausing in a slight curtsey. The girl returned her greeting, but her companion stared at her. Dolly noticed that tears were brimming in her brown eyes.

"Hallo, Dolly," said Miss Ulsey, "seen Willie?"

Dolly shook her head. "He be having a battle, miss."

"Yes," the girl nodded, "he was here a few minutes ago, but ran off in a hurry. He's being chased, I think. Great sport, a battle, isn't it?"

"Aiy," replied Dolly, "he was allus one fur mischief,

was Mas' Wullie. Young limb, some calls un, but I reckons he's a'right."

"Of course he is," interrupted the brown-eyed girl, with sudden vivacity.

"You've heard of Dolly, haven't you, Jo?" said Elsie.

"Aiy, thay all have heered tell of Dolly," remarked the woman, but her bitterness went as she returned the sweet eager smile of Mary. As she went on, Elsie said, "I say, if you *do* happen to see Willie, you might tell him that we both believe in him, will you?"

"Ess, Miss Ulsey, ess ee wull."

"Thanks, Dolly. Good-bye."

"Gudebye, Miss Ulsey."

Dolly saw more boys, but not Willie. Soon she left all conflict behind, and came out from along the trees. At the lower edge of the forest slope ran the brook, fringed with tall green plants. She followed this for some way, till the shoulder of the wood lifted to the right up a steep hill, and she was in an open meadow. By the margin of the stream she stooped to gather a bunch of brooklime, their little flowers like blue eyes wondering at heaven. Dragonflies of crimson and emerald—winged crystals of light—passed with a whirr by her head, a vole disturbed in shy nibbling dived with a hollow and liquid splash into the current. She thought how lovely was the summer day, how simple the lives of the flowers and the waterfolk. Years ago Jim had told her of them, but she had not heeded much. She had liked only to hear his voice: that had been sufficient. He used to say that each flower was his, that he knew the meaning of the wind and the shine of the stars, but she had not understood.

She stopped by the drinking place of the cattle, where the swift shallow flow rolled the glistening pebbles and drew from each a drizzle of soft music. A dandelion-fronted wagtail paused on a boulder, calling with silver chirrupings to her mate upstream. Dreamily Dolly listened, her heart sad in spite of all. With gray wings a turtle dove came to drink of the life-giving water. Dolly's eyes opened wide, they burned, and were quenched in tears.

"Cushie doo, cushie doo," her lips murmured, "where

be he? Once he told me his heart were in the wind and the grass an' had been fur always. Cushie doo, cushie doo, you'm so happy—you'm have your nest in the hawthorn's heart."

Thus she spoke, in a low and passionate voice to her own breast. So the forlorn waters of her soul burst from hoarded misery and carried her away on their flood. While upon the air vibrant with the hum of summer her plaint had been released, for one moment she had looked straight into the heart of its beauty. It was as though the vole had paused in feeding and regarded her tenderly, the wagtail whispered in pity to her, the dove with soft eyes glanced lovingly, the brooklime yielded its petals for solace of her anguish. A moment only, but into the heart of summer she had peered; its fire had wrapped her round, as whilom she had been cloaked by love of mortal man; she felt that the spirit of her beloved was near, swaying near in the sunshine.

A golden-crowned knight flitted to the sandy shallows and sipped thrice, meditating after each sip. And something caused him to sing: maybe the radiance hovering like a phantom mayfly over the brook: maybe he, too, saw the spirit of summer, which is love: a golden thread of instant song he spun, and cast it into the waterflow: and in bee-like flight passed over the bowed head of the woman.

FEAR

TOM SORRELL was standing by his tin-roofed cottage as she walked down the bramble-grown and chalky cart track. His heart beat faster. She smiled a little wanly, and wondered why she had come to the quarry. She did not want to hurt Tom.

The nearest of the three kilns had been banked the night before with blocks of chalk, and now the circular rim was unencumbered. The second kiln was cooling; the chalk, freed of its carbonic acid gas, had become lime. From the pile at the top of the third kiln strayed a vapour, for the fires below had not long been kindled.

All three were built into a bank, so that one half of a kiln was embedded and flush with the higher ground. The other side was bare, just stone and mortar. At the base were the flues and iron doors. A heap of clinkers and a long iron shovel lay at the door of the near kiln.

Tom was thinking of digging in his patch on the far side of the quarry when he saw Dolly. He was tall and powerful, big-footed, and covered with a fine chalky dust. Seeing her, he wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

"Fine weather, Dolly!"

"Aiy, Tom."

"Ye bant workin s'afternoon, then?"

"No."

Tom scratched his head, and tilted his rusty straw-hat over his blue eyes. Then he coughed and spat.

"Tarrible thirsty work it be, with thay kilns."

"Aiy, Tom."

He spat once more.

"Dish o' tea, will ee naw?"

"Doan't ee trouble, Tom Sorrell."

"Aw, bant no trouble," he smiled.

"Let un make it fur ee."

"Thank ee, Dolly."

She went into the house. It had but one floor, and consisted of two rooms, and a scullery with a handpump and sink. It was very dirty and dim inside; the iron of Tom's heavy boots rang on the cement floor.

A fire was burning in a grate. On the table was a used plate, a knife and fork, and a cut loaf of bread. Tom lounged about, while Dolly filled the black iron kettle from the pump that clattered and spouted its water unevenly.

She placed the kettle on the fire, and sat down. Tom still lounged about, moving things with his hand. The wallpaper was greasy and worn in patches, showing the chipped plaster. In one corner a damp stain was spread. The woman went to the window and stared out, seeing the white quarry and the thorns on its lip, and tangled rootlets. Some large sunflowers grew outside, and hollyhocks.

"You'm be very quiet here, Tom."

"Aiy, 'tis quiet," replied the quarry man.

After a while Dolly said :

"In the wood the skuleboys be having a battle. Young Wullie be in it."

"Good young spark, Wullie, reckons. He'm growed up wild."

"But not a rough un."

"Naw."

"Doan't seem to miss ees mother."

"Going away to Lunnon soon, so he said."

"He woan't alike that, reckons."

"Feel lonely, shud think."

"Aiy, but un can feel lonely here, Dolly."

"Yes," she sighed.

"I be turrible lonely, at times, Dolly."

Somewhere in the thorns at the quarry's lip above the cottage a gray dove was cooing, and its moan came softly down the chimney. Tom, leaning against the wall, murmured :

"Sh'ud like a lill lad like Wullie Madd'zun. Plenty of spirit, but not a rough un."

"I mind he as a babby. A pretty babby, he were."

"Your babby'd be pretty, Dolly," he said slowly.

A pain seemed to show in her face.

"Dolly," said Tom Sorrell huskily, staring at her.

"Ess, Tom," she answered, the pain now in her voice.

"Won't ee wed wi' un, Dolly? Knaws I be pining fur ee."

The woman did not move.

"Dolly, I waits and waits, fur I love ee, and only ee. Won't ee love me, my maid? I've got nigh dree hunner pun saved up, all fur ee, my lill maid. I put the money by, 'stead of spending it in pub."

"'Tisn't that, Tom Sorrell," she almost whispered.

"Do ee love some un ulse, Dolly?"

"No one, Tom. It bant that."

"Be ee waiting fur Jim 'Olloman, then?" his voice demanded, but she did not reply. *Coo-coo-roo, roo*, from the dove among the leafy spines. The cottage was built under a

steep face of the cliff, at the top of which was the road between Colham and Rookhurst. Dolly, hardly daring to answer, not knowing, indeed, what to answer, was only conscious of the dull stamp of hooves on the road.

"Cos if ee be waiting fur Jim Olloman," the man went on, "I doan't think he'm a-coming back. I'll tull fur why——"

His hoarse voice broke. It stopped under a breathless emotion. The stamp of hooves died away, there was a man's shout. Dolly looked piteously at Tom, who was leaning forward.

"I luv ee turrible," the hoarse voice of Tom went on, "do ee come here now. Let me show ee something." He stared at her, and pointed vaguely behind him at the lime-kilns.

"Do ee rec'llect th' time when young Will'um Madd'zun runned away wi' Jim?"

She nodded, and her hands went to her heart.

"Do ee rec'llect hearing on how he couldna find Jim Ollomun in th' marning?"

Dolly rose, black faintness rushing to meet her from everywhere. Tom leaned forward, breathing very heavily.

"Ah'll tull ee," he gasped, "ah'll tull us fur why Jim Ollomun——" He gulped labouredly. "Ah'll tull ee fur why Jim Ollomun be gone fur ever. Ah looked over thik top in thik morning, and on thik white-hot lime ah zeed—ah zeed——"

He stopped, trembling. Somebody was banging at the door, and shaking the handle.

"What be ut?" cried the woman, her voice high with fear.

The door was being kicked by heavy boots. The noise ceased, and quick steps sounded outside the window; a face looked in through the glass.

"Jan Fry," the woman said.

"What be you wanting?" called Tom, going to the closed window. For answer John Fry shook his fist to heaven; there was a splinter of glass, as the fist was dashed through the pane. The preacher stared sombrely, then spoke in a deep strange voice:—

"Scarlet, sinful woman, inhabitant of Gomorrah! Ye shall conceive chaff, ye shall bring forth stubble: your breath as fire, shall devour you.

Tom and Dolly stood silent. John Fry, a little foam at the corners of his mouth, his nostrils distending, spoke on:—

"Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of people with unclean lips.

"Lust not after her beauty in thine heart; neither let her take thee with her eyelids.

"For by means of a whorish woman a man is brought to a piece of bread. Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?"

"He'm possessed of the devil," muttered Tom.

John Fry lashed at the window with his fist, shattering the squares of glass, which fell on the inside sill with ragged drops of blood.

FOREBODING

JOHN FRY had been away for three days, living during that time with a woman known as Lizzie Pim, who loved him, and suffered his brutalities patiently. For her livelihood Lizzie Pim haunted the market and the waterside taverns. She had known John Fry for three years. Since her first casual acquaintanceship with him she had endeavoured to abandon this livelihood, but she did not possess the necessary courage to do so—that is, she made a meagre living and had no chance to take up conventional work. She fretted. She also fretted because John Fry did not find sufficient the love she would give him, but needed much brandy as well: and he reviled her. Once she had poured away a bottle and he had beaten her with his buckled belt, breaking one of her ribs. Sometimes he, with solemn earnestness, quoted the chapter of Proverbs about her sinful life. Then she would weep, but this humility, possibly the commencement, long desired, of a new life, would cause him to explain that only other men were concerned . . . after his periodical bouts

John Fry felt no physical or mental exhaustion, but was strengthened in his idea of religious inspiration. His grandfather had died in the asylum, in the firm belief that he had designed the leaning Tower of Pisa, Sarum Cathedral, and the Tower of Babel. In reality he had, before his affliction, been a poor ignorant labourer who had seen the pictures of these buildings when he was a youth.

John Fry reached home that afternoon and ignored his mother's fluttered greeting. She got him high tea, but he would eat nothing; just resting with his cropped head on his hands. Once she heard him muttering, and was fearful.

"O Lord, who maketh his angels spirits, his ministers a flaming fire."

She knew where he had been and what he had been doing. She had known for a long time, but had never said anything to him about it. This knowledge caused her deep suffering; a pain seemed tearing at her breasts as she saw his trembling hands.

"Woan't ee try crab jelly, now Jannie?" she persuaded timidly. Her son did not answer. For a time he sat unmoving and taciturn, then rose and jumped into his cart, which had been left unattended in the road. He whipped the horse and passed away down the lane. A foreboding of terror made her clutch at her little black bonnet and cape, don them hurriedly, and go swiftly after him, whimpering to herself.

CONFLICT

WILLIE saw John Fry in his dogcart as he clambered over the gate leading from a barley field to the road. He waved, and demanded breathlessly that he should stop. "Give us a lift, I say, give us a lift," he entreated. The man's face was putty-coloured, and he wore no cap. He lashed at Willie with his whip, shouted something in a savage voice, and did not stop.

The quarry was nearly a quarter of a mile away, on the left, hidden by the tall hedge. A grateful slope aided Willie's progress. His body was covered with wet, his throat dry

and rough, his heart pumping in his ears. The distance seemed interminable. Thinking to save time he scrambled through a gap in the hedge, plodded gaspingly across a field of turnips that hindered at every step, and so to the bushes of blackthorn, bramble, and may-tree. A trailing claw of dog-rose ripped at his wrist and drew a harsh tear down the back of his hand.

He made for a place where it was possible to slide down the chalky side without breaking a leg. Peering into the quarry, under the bushes, he saw something that made him stop and, willy-nilly, forget the urgency of his errand.

The preacher and the quarry man were fighting, and rolling near the top of a kiln. Dolly with her hands over her eyes stood near the cottage.

Willie felt a thrill in his backbone that made him shudder. He tried to make himself move, and go to the help of Tom, but he could not. He tried to shout, but only his mouth opened. The fighters rolled over and over, nearer and nearer the fire. Then Willie understood that John Fry was dragging Tom, trying to throw him in.

He leapt up, and rushed about for help. Incoherent noises came from his throat. He turned to the gap, rushed away again. Then Dolly began to scream.

Willie slid down the bank, turning over and over, and not feeling the blows. At the bottom he seized a great flint, dark on its split side. He went towards them.

The faces of the men were blotched with the strain of conflict. The long bare scar on the head of the preacher was livid. Willie poised the flint to drop it on his head, just as John Fry flung off the quarryman, who lay for a moment as though his back were broken.

Willie ran away, but stopped, for the preacher rushed towards Dolly. She screeched, and tried to crouch up into the wall. He seized her by the shoulder, and tore off her blouse, but she bent her head and bit through the skin on the back of his hand. Willie came nearer, the flint poised. Dolly was kicking furiously, and with his flint Willie got within three yards of them. Holding it in both hands he heaved it at the back of John Fry, who with a snarl

turned round and came after him. Once more Willie darted away, terribly afraid.

But Tom had recovered, and as he passed flung himself at the other's legs. With a crash the preacher went over, and the heaving, struggle continued.

Both men were big and powerful. Tom wrapped his arms round the other's chest and hung on. Constantly John Fry by nervous energy heaved himself up, trying to bite into the big swelling vein on the other's neck. Nearer the kiln lid they approached, while now and again a flame pale in the sunshine quivered upwards in wavy liquid heat and disappeared.

Willie recovered the stone, and feeling bolder with Dolly near, advanced with the sharp edge downwards, intending to drop it on the madman's head. The faces of both men were bruised and bloody. Willie slung the flint at John Fry and missed, and almost immediately the quarryman began to groan and sob. The preacher had kicked him with his nailed boot and made him vomit with the pain.

A spew of his adversary's blood was in John Fry's eyes as he got up, and his lips were bitten. With a feral turn, and hunched up shoulders, he faced the woman and the boy. His head seemed to shrink into his neck, he pointed threatening at Dolly and in a sonorous voice he mouthed :—

"Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink."

"Which justify the wicked for reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him."

Stealthily Tom Sorrell arose, and as John Fry took an uncertain step forward he hit him on the back of the neck. The cursing man pitched forward, but recovered, and ran at Dolly. He caught her by the hair and flung her down, then hit Willie behind the ear, so hard that he collapsed.

END OF THE BATTLE

WILLIE looked up as a mournful cry seemed to haunt the air around him. He felt sick. The wailing went on, rising

like a lament. Willie raised himself, feebly, and looked about him. He saw Dolly leaning against the cottage wall. He saw Tom Sorrell, panting and his chest heaving, with torn clothes and wild hair, standing near. He saw John Fry kneeling by a little figure in black, his mother, who had come to him, and tried to end the conflict. Her son had hit her above the heart, she had fallen, her worn hands beating her bodice, and never moved. .

John Fry jabbered at the dead old woman, stroking her small withered face. Seeing this, Dolly turned and rested her brow on the stone wall. A dove in the blackthorns was cooing, and for a long time it seemed the only sound of the summer evening. At last, as Willie watched, John Fry arose, and stood by the edge of the kiln, turning his eyes to the sky. His mother lay unmoving on the chalky sward browned by the heat.

"Oh, Lord God, have mercy on the fallen!"

He rent his clothes, then held both arms to heaven, crudely, pitifully.

"And ye shall be as the burnings of lime: as thorns cut up shall they be burned in the fire. Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?"

"O Lord, who maketh his angels spirits, his ministers a flaming fire . . . send Thou thy chariot and take thy chosen from . . . the land. . . ."

His head fell forward, his arms beat the air. Backwards he swayed, and plunged into the open kiln. There was a hoarse cry from Tom Sorrell, a sinister flurry of sparks; and the sudden frail screaming of swifts awheel in a sky of flawless sapphire.

THE PASSING OF THE BLOSSOM

*“And her beauty far away
Would fade, as her voice ran on,
Till hazel and summer sun,
And all were gone.”*

WALTER DE LA MARE.

MEETING BY THE TUMULUS

AFTER long toiling the boy reached the summit of the downs, and sat down on the sward. The wind sighful in the grasses stirred a solitary harebell, the companion of his reverie. He saw the fields below him, uneven rectangles of ripe grain. The wheat was goldening, cast into varying tints by its bend and sway, the oats were yellow, the barley white save when the broad shadow of a cloud glided over it.

Far away he could see the low farmhouse at Skirr, the place of how many happy days in the past. The tame pigeons were circling over it—there had been pigeons in the cots ever since he could remember. Beyond was the village, a cluster of slate and thatch roofs, the great green beech wood, and the silver mere.

He sat beside an ancient tumulus on which grew wild thyme and orange claws of birdsfoot trefoil. For several days Willie had lain beside the mound in lone meditation. By the lake he was disconsolate, the meadows and the brook had too many memories, with Jack a dull misery obsessed him. Here on the highest hill with a view of many miles of plain, and the unseen, romantic sea beyond, the misery would lift and leave him calm. Here he might sit with his chin on his knees and gaze at the well-loved places that would know him no more. Here he might lie beside the floating harebell and dream of the ancient Briton whose bones for centuries had lain under the mound. Here the singing lark, the rufous kestrel, and the wandering honey-bee were detached from life and happiness, here the sky was of azure remote and untarnished. Only the wind that had come from those fields was able to draw him back to the realisation of the end, and its gentle sighing brought a consolation.

A blue butterfly passed airily in the sunshine, and rested on a golden flower of hawkbit. Emotion surged in his heart, an

ecstasy at the glory of the morning sun. Forgotten was the morrow, and its farewell to everything. This feeling of pure joy lasted but a moment, and yet it seemed timeless; the grasses had been all the time, and the lark, and himself had been with them. Lying there with outspread arms he was merged into summer loveliness; a wild man bearded and hairy was standing with him, regarding the figure recumbent before them. So sharp was the impression that he rose on his elbow, and shivering, looked round for the companion. The mind that wondered now was quite apart from the mind that had seen himself. There was almost a disappointment in being within his body once more. He was alone, utterly alone, with the wild bee and the wild thyme, and the mound hiding the mortal remains of what ancient warrior?

A swishing sound in the grass behind, and he turned round. A girl was standing on the rampart of the old encampment, looking away. She wore a white sweater nearly concealed by her long black hair, and a skirt of rough blue material which the wind moved about her bare brown legs. Resenting the intrusion Willie turned round again. To his amazement she was coming towards him: she had stopped.

"Hallo, Willie," she said, in a small humble voice.

"Hallo," he answered, not looking up.

"May I sit beside you, please?"

He shrugged his shoulders, mortified at the violation by this girl of good conduct. "It's not my hill," he replied.

He imagined her to shrink, for she said, very humbly, "Oh, I'm sorry, then I'll go. Only——"

Her humility was so sincere that he partly repented his surly behaviour.

"Oh, don't think that, please. I was thinking when you came up, that's all."

"I'll keep very quiet if you let me stay."

"All right, then."

"Thanks awfully," she breathed fervently, "it's awfully decent of you, really."

He glanced at her, hesitating whether to snub her or to ignore what he himself considered rather bad form. But

seeing her obvious joy, which she did not trouble to hide, he could only stare. She sprawled beside him, her brown knees exposed, the white jersey obviously too small and shrinking away from sunburnt wrists. She seemed to take a frank delight in regarding him, with eager face and parted lips. Willie frowned, and her dark eyes lost their lustre.

"What were you going to say?" he inquired, "when you said you would go?"

"I was disappointed over something, and felt rotten."

"About me?"

She nodded, looking at her stretched skirt. Willie felt flattered and curious, and desired to hear more.

"What was it?"

"It's your last day."

"It's nothing to do with her," thought Willie.

"You will write, won't you?" she whispered, her face hidden by that dark and free hair.

Willie regarded contemptuously her knees; but as she seemed quite unconscious of her attitude he felt rather ashamed. A great scar was below the right kneecap, and her legs showed old bramble scratches.

"You've never wrote me an answer to those two I wrote you," she added.

"I never got them," mumbled Willie.

"I posted them very carefully myself," assured Mary.

Willie felt that she knew he was lying, so he said, mysteriously:

"A lot of curious things happen here. There's something fishy about the postman, so they say."

Mary said nothing to this, and Willie plucked a dry grass and chewed it.

"How did you get that socking great scar on your knee?" he inquired quickly, lest Mary might wish an explanation about the fishy postman.

"Oh, that?" she answered, plucking at the hem of her skirt and exposing the entire knee, "oh, that's nothing. I flopped off a tree when Howard and me went after a heron's nest."

"Good lord, have you got a heron's egg?"

"Yes, several."

"Get 'em yourself?"

She nodded.

"What were they, elm trees?"

"Yes."

"You must be pretty plucky."

"Oh, no, I love climbing. I think *you're* plucky. I think you're jolly brave, and so does Elsie, the way you went for help, and afterwards lammed that madman."

Willie, since he had been very prominent in the tragedy, was not embarrassed.

"It was nothing," he remarked.

"And also you saved little Bill Nye's life. I *love* Bill Nye."

"He's not a bad chap."

"And I *love* Dolly. I think she's awfully brave."

"She's pretty decent. I'm glad she's going to leave Rookhurst. They are a miserable lot of talkers there. They talked about her and Jim, and now they talk about her and Tom Sorrell. As though people can't be friends!"

"Will you be my friend, Willie?" asked Mary, rather wistfully. She was clasping her skirt round her ankles, and resting her chin on her knees. Quite unconsciously the girl had copied the meditative attitude of the boy.

"Yes, if you like, Mary."

"Thanks awfully."

"Have you any brothers or sisters?" he asked, after a pause.

"Um," she nodded, "two brothers and two sisters. Father's dead."

"Who's Howard, then?"

"A chap I know."

"Has he got some decent eggs?"

She nodded her head vigorously. "He can swim a mile and a half, and has got three hundred books."

"All about birds, and the country?"

"Some of them. He's very keen on litt—literarial—what-you-call-it. Anyhow, it means old books, classics, and things."

Willie was silent, for melancholy had come upon him.

There had been a divine sadness in the lonely contemplation of those scenes that held so much of dearness to him, but in the presence of a comparative stranger, and a girl too, he felt merely wretched. Mary seemed to absorb his mood, for she brooded. A grasshopper that with risping chirrup had been praying to the sun flipped to her bare foot and straddled its bright greenness across her toes. Mary leaned forward and regarded it, moving her toes.

"Oh, you beautiful thing," she thrilled to herself, in a low voice.

The grasshopper flipped away, and joined the Magian worshippers in the grass. Mary sighed, very softly, and touched with her finger the solitary harebell. Willie continued to look down at the plain where every year for hundreds of years the harvests had been garnered. In fancy his mind strayed back to the commencement of reckoned time, when with rude implements and ponderous oxen the earth was scarred and the furrows sown with corn. The labour repeated, the sorrow and hunger iterated, and eventually rest in the ground that bore life and death with equal calm. If all the toilers were marshalled now, the legions would fill the vast plain below and beyond: and what would they say? Bent of back, rheumy of eye, and with thickened joints: for what end was their labour unceasing upon the earth. With a return of the joyous feeling Willie thought: "I have been here before—the warrior in the tumulus is here, and has always been here. There is no change really." Then he said to Mary:

"To-morrow I've got to go to London. It is good-bye to everything, except for a fortnight a year. I shall die in London."

He turned on his face, and pressed it into the warm grass. He did not feel ashamed, as he would have done had Elsie been present. Perhaps, he dimly guessed, it was because Mary did not matter.

He felt her arm on his back, and was grateful. "Don't worry, Willie," she whispered, "don't worry," then laid her cheek on his coat.

"It's awful, you're going away," she went on shakily,

"it is really. When I think about it, it is like as if I don't want to live any more." She stopped, and pressed her face more affectionately on his ribs.

Willie felt better soon. "I'm a fool," he complained. "You must think me pretty sappy."

"Oh no, I don't, Willie. You see, I understand you, and many people don't."

"Many people?"

"Well, some. They think you're morbid. But I never thought so. Mother thinks I'm morbid, too, but Great-Uncle Sufford understands. So you see, I understand you, and always have, haven't I?"

"Oh, have you," he remarked lamely, "but what do you mean by 'some people'?"

"Oh well, it's nothing really. P'raps I oughtn't to have spoken like that."

A heavy feeling oppressed him. He swallowed, then asked, faintly apprehensive, "I suppose you mean Elsie?"

"Oh no, Elsie understands you," replied the loyal Mary. But Willie was not convinced, and he became afraid.

Soon he rose and said, "What about your shoes and stockings?"

"I came up without any," blushed Mary, at his disapproval. "I never wear any at home. I live by the sea."

"Oh, really. Well, I'm off now. Are you going down that way? Because I'm going off this way. I promised to meet some one. I really must go now. Good-bye."

He hurried off, leaving Mary standing still and looking after him. His footsteps through the plummy grasses released from anchorage many aery seeds of dandelion that floated away in the wind sun-stained and whispering. At the foot of the downs Willie turned, but nowhere could he see Mary. He hastened on, for he did not want to be late for lunch with Jack. His father was expecting him, but that did not matter. It was his last day.

SORROWS OF THE HUMBLE

AFTER lunch the friends retired to the loft over the disused stable with their pipes of cherry wood purchased a few days ago for one halfpenny in the general store at Rookhurst. The entrance to this sanctuary was guarded by an old door hidden with ivy, and the lock was so stiff with rust that only a stick used as a lever would turn the key. Inside the floor of beaten earth and stones was covered with furze-roots and logs of pinewood, in the middle of which reared an ancient weighing machine now the abode of spiders whose dusty webs everywhere were laden with the wings of moths and the empty cases of flies.

They closed the door, and relocked it. A vertical ladder stretched into the dim loft above, which for years had been a retreat desired on account of its detachment from life, and its treasure of apples and magazines. It was a lovely place for talking secrets; had they not in far off days discovered here a rusty single-barrel, without a trigger, and several bags of snipe-shot? It had been forbidden, but that had enhanced it as a place for hiding and for the discussion of plans.

Willie climbed up first, and looked around him. The same old mattress on the floor, the same feathers escaping from it, the same stuffed birds on their loose perches slowly falling apart in a last moult, the same picture frames with their faded huntsmen mounted on unnatural hunters leaping unnatural hedges. Jack rose beside him, and stood still. Faintly from the rusty grate came the same wheezy clutter of the staves on the chimney tuns, while the same pattering of the sparrows' feet on the gutter sounded through the walls. Everything was the same: nothing changed here: it would remain so when he had gone away. In the gloom Jack whispered, "I've got them all here, safely. No one saw."

"Good chap," replied Willie in a relieved tone. "You're sure no one saw?"

"Absolutely!"

"They're in that old corn-bin. In a tin, to keep the rats away."

"Rightho. How much was it?"

"Oh, that's nothing."

"Come on, man, I must pay."

"Oh no, I'll do that."

But Willie persisted, and eventually Jack pocketed two shillings and threepence. They sat down on the exhausted mattress.

"Tobacco?" asked Jack, holding out a tin.

"Maresee," Willie thanked him, with an accent that of olden time would have caused a ratpoisonous jig-and-chew, "what is it?"

"Guv'nor's."

"Not that poisonous twist I've seen lying about on the window ledges?"

"No. His special. Pinched it yesterday."

"Bong," approved Willie, smelling it, "there's no latter-keer in this. I don't like latterkeer."

"No more do I," agreed his friend, wondering what it was.

They lit their pipes and smoked rapidly, sometimes coughing. The blue smoke hung listlessly in the stagnant air of the loft. Outside the sparrows cheeped and scolded everlastingly.

"What time to-night?" asked Jack.

"Ten o'clock," murmured Willie, looking at an otter that grinned unmoving in the dimness.

"Till midnight?"

"Yes. You'll have the ladder in position against the southern window?"

"Trust me." He sighed, and stared at the worm-eaten boards. "I wish——"

"Go on."

"Oh, it don't matter."

"You wish what?"

"I wish you weren't so keen on her," burst out Jack.

"Oh, shut up."

"There is no need for that sneering manner with me,

Willie. I merely think, as your friend, that she isn't worth anything."

Willie sneered again. "What do *you* know about love, you with your materialistic temperament."

"I can't help my materialism, but how do you know what I feel. I don't tell every one I meet about my affairs."

"Do I?"

"I'm not saying you do. Every one knows how you feel about Elsie, though!"

"Who do you mean by every one?"

"Well, the Margents know, the Cerr-Nores, the Riddles, and the Radford girls, my sisters and mother, Bryers and Bony, Clemow and Hoys, Miss Nicholson——"

"I don't believe it," said Willie in desperation.

"It's an honest fact, Willie.

The lover looked miserable. Jack went on, with the air of one who has made up his mind to be hurt, "Honest, Willie, I do wish you would listen to me——"

Willie sniffed impatiently. "Jack, you *can't* understand, really you can't. To me she is, oh, I don't know how to put it. Without her, my life is hollow and useless. If anything happened to her—good lord, how did all these people know?"

Jack puffed a lot of smoke, coughed, and looked at the rafters. "Elsie told them, or they heard through her."

Willie stared at him in miserable silence.

"I believe in speaking out," continued Jack. "I'm not going to shut my mouth up to fact. I'm not going to be like you in the battle, refusing to say anything, and so causing a lot of unnecessary rows. Think of that rotten last day at school. I hoped it would be so ripping for us. After all, you were a hero, and your fight with Yeates was quite unnecessary, like the thick ear and the fat eye you got. You could have been pally with all the chaps again without that fat eye and thick ear, if only you had not shut your jaw so tight."

"Oh, I've had all that before," a weary voice answered him, "but tell me about the . . . the . . . you know."

"All right, then. As you know neither of my sisters likes Elsie. Nor do I, not very much, I mean."

"Girls are spiteful."

"Of course they are, and no chap can ever trust them, but that's nothing to do with it. Elsie's all right in her way, but she don't understand you. Do you remember that book we read, called *Tono Bungay*? Well, you are an artistic creator, and I'm just nothing, but Elsie's absolutely a materialist. And behind your back she laughs at you for being so keen on birds and things. Do you think I like to know that a materialistic creator laughs at my friend, a chap who I know jolly well is a million times too good for any girl, and who will jolly well get on in the world."

"You don't understand," repeated a miserable Willie.

"I'm certain that you don't understand her properly, otherwise you wouldn't be so—so . . . so keen on her. Won't you believe me, old man?"

The reference to his antiquity was not displeasing to Willie, who with a tragic expelling of breath and acrid smoke could only iterate that Jack did not understand. How could his friend, who slept so soundly at night and always had a good appetite, appreciate, for instance, his thought of a drowned Ideal, lashed close to a drifting mast, the salt tears frozen in her eyes and her hair waving in the seawater? Had he not seen her real side, the true nature of her beautiful soul, when she had sat with him by the stile, in rapt silence for hours and hours, never speaking, just munching the chocolate he had bought for her, her beautiful soul in rapture at the loveliness of the landscape? No, Jack's rotten sisters, jealous of her beauty, had poisoned the mind of his friend. Even if Elsie had told every one of his love for her (though he had never dared to say anything of it to his Ideal) it would make no difference. Oh, never in the world before had there been a love like his, never before had there lived a stainless goddess like the girl whom that night he would ask to wait for him.

The ivy leaves touched the windows, a gathering of lazy flies wove and interwove aimlessly under the bursting ceiling. Jack puffed, and Willie puffed, arguing and striking many

matches that kindled a shower of sparks in the fuming bowls of cherrywood. After an hour and a half of intermittent tapping, blowing and igniting the loft smelt like a place where they burn old meat bones, without, however, interfering with the melancholy romance of their last afternoon. Willie had an acute depression in the pit of his stomach, and Jack was thankful that he had not taken the twist tobacco.

"I expect tea's ready," he suggested, "shall we come?"

"It was a good wheeze coming here, wasn't it?"

"Not half. I think the cherrywoods are fine, don't you? The flavour of cherry adds a distinct fragrance to the tobacco."

"Oh, rather. I say, are you sure the ladder will be all right against that window?"

"Yes. We'll unfasten it now, shall we?"

They knocked back the pitted hasp and levered up the frame. It creaked and stuck. Willie said that he would open it at night, and with one last glance at the loft they descended and emerged into the disenchantment of daylight.

"How about your Guv'nor?" asked Jack, as they went across the yard, where a little fourteen-year-old maid was straining at the long pump handle, "won't he expect you to tea?"

"Oh, no," replied Willie, pumping the water for the maid.

After tea, during which all had an air of glum abstraction, he went to The Firs, under whose magical roof ate and slept his Ideal. The house seemed to be contemptuous of him, and the gate to be positively antagonistic, as in answer to its spring it swung back and butted his ribs. Between the rose trees Willie walked, and sat down in the sagging hammock of esparto grass that how many times had borne his Ideal as she reclined in a sweet shyness of thought. There on the grass below was a book, face downwards. Reverently Willie picked it up. It was Elsie's book: she had handled it. He wondered if the poet had ever been in love like himself. Idly he glanced at the poem before him.

*I met a lady in the meads
Full beautiful—a facry's child,*

*Her hair was long, her foot was light,
And her eyes were wild.*

"Why, it is beautiful," he sighed, and read on to the end, and turning to the beginning.

*O what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
Alone and palely loitering?
The sedge is withered from the lake,
And no birds sing.*

"No wonder Rupert Bryers was always telling me about Keats," he muttered, strangely moved by the image presented to his fancy.

*The squirrel's granary is full,
And the harvest's done.*

He glanced at the name of the ballad: *La Belle Dame sans Merci*—The beautiful lady without thanks—The thankless lady . . . then turned to other pages, reading a few lines in each.

*Full on this casement shone the wintry moon,
And threw warm gules on Madeline's fair breast
As down she knelt for Heaven's grace and boon;
Rose-bloom fell on her hands, together prest
And on her silver cross soft amethyst
And on her hair a glory like a saint. . . .*

"It's very lovely," he thought, then read part of the *Introduction*, with Shelley's poem—*He has outsoar'd the shadow of our night*. Lord Byron, apparently, had said that Keats was of the Cockney School. That perhaps accounted for the unusual way of spelling "jewels" as "gules." His cousin Phillip had told him that Londoners spoke with a funny accent, and apparently they spelled as curiously. However, thought Willie, Lord Byron was rather a cad to call attention to any one's spelling.

*Or by the moon lifting her silver rim
Above a cloud, and with a gradual swim
Coming into the blue with all her light.*

"Now I know why poetry is written." Willie was astounded by his discovery. "It's because the poet loves the spirit of these things."

*Young men and maidens at each other gazed
With hands held back, and motionless, amazed
To see the brightness in each other's eyes;
And so they stood, filled with a sweet surprise
Until their tongues were loosed in poesy.
Therefore no lover did of anguish die. . . .*

"There has been some one else in the world like me," he said to the sky, "but I could never write anything like that. I feel it, though, I do, really. Why, the portrait is just like Phillip. I wonder if he has read Keats. Oh, to-morrow I must go to London."

Sweetly a greenfinch called by the crimson rain of the gladioli and the walnut leaves twirled dismayfully at this declamation of his departure. Willie let fall the book of poems into the hammock and regarded tragically the pathway. Round the eastern corner of the house came Mary, who saw him and smiled: as in the east the eager dawn follows the Lightbringer, so might she have come to him. But the boy stared gloomily from the hammock.

"Hallo," he returned her nervous greeting, "I say—have you—I mean—where's—"

"Elsie? She's in the dining-room, reading. Shall I tell her you're here?"

"Oh, it doesn't matter."

Mary seemed anxious to please him, for she did not ask again, but ran to the hammock, and sat on the ground at his feet, looking up into his face.

"So to-morrow you go to London," she spoke half to herself. "I'm going away to-morrow too."

"To London?"

"No, to Speering, where I live. By the marshes, and the seawall, and the sandpipers calling. Oh, Willie, you would love it, just love it!"

"Huh."

"Oh, I *know* you would. There are herons, and wild duck, and eels in the dykes, and Luke the old fisherman to talk to in his shed, all alone with his pile of old boots he saves from the tide."

"How awful."

"It isn't, really. I wish you could see him. I've never had any one to share the thoughts of all the lovely things. You're the only friend I've had who understands me. If you write, will you call me 'Jo'? Oh, Willie, do!"

"Me? But I hardly know you."

"Ah, but I know you. Yes, I know you, Willie. You will write, won't you? Oh Willie, Willie—"

She leaned up, and touched his knee with a hand little and hued like wheat goldy-brown at the harvest. Willie, utterly wretched, knocked it away with his elbow. Mary shrank back, turned her head so that her sorrowful dark hair hid her face, and went away. A minute later Elsie came, and sat beside him in the hammock, which bulged and touched the ground beneath.

"Cheer up, Willie," she smiled. "Any one would think you were going to a funeral. Where's Jack?"

"Home."

"What a gloomy voice you speak in. Charlie's in the house. He came to tea. I half expected you to come, but you didn't, did you? What did you say to Mary that she went off in a huff? She wouldn't speak to me as she went upstairs"

"Nothing."

"Cheer up, Willie," she repeated, "or you'll be making us all thoroughly miserable. Really, you know, you ought not to let yourself go so, or you'll be growing up with an unhealthy mind. Father says that it is only the little minds that are unhealthy."

Willie felt more hopelessly unhealthy at every word, which feeling was perhaps increased by the realisation that

he was hopelessly misunderstood and also that her ideas of his unhealthy mind must have been gleaned from conversation between her parents: and Charlie Cerr-Nore probably had been discussing him.

"You never seem to be enjoying yourself as other boys do, do you? Everybody says so. I should have thought that London would be lovely. I know when I stopped there with mother I thought it a lovely place. Much better than Rookhurst. I should be awfully bucked if I were you."

Each revelation of the new Elsie was like a numbing injection of some potent drug into his heart. Try as he might, Willie could make no reply. His Ideal spoke her possibly well-meant advice in a voice of cheerful encouragement that surely indicated her freedom from Love's Pain.

"I'm not morbid, Elsie," he stammered. "You don't understand."

"Father says that those people who say that they are misunderstood are usually the ones to misunderstand."

Listlessly Willie took up the volume of Keats, and turned the pages.

*Darkling I listen : and for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death,
Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,
To take into the air my quiet breath. . . .*

"Listen, Elsie," he breathed, blinking quickly. "You've read this, of course, because it's thumb-marked. It's the *Ode to a Nightingale*."

*Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird !
No hungry generations tread thee down
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown :
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn. . . .*

He read no more, for the words on the page had commenced a blurred and embarrassing jig.

"But what does it all mean? Is it poetry? We get enough of that sort of thing at Wespælar. That's not my book."

"Elsie, Elsie, can't you see how lovely it is? It's what Keats thought about the nightingale. It's near autumn now, Elsie, and the swallows will be going south. I'm glad, too, because I've got to go away from you, and Jack, and all the places that I know so well."

Elsie looked at him in surprise, and tossed her hair so that it dispread its gold masses over her shoulder and side. Her hand touched his that clutched so fiercely the poems, and she said in a soothing voice:

"Don't feel so sad, Willie. I know it's pretty hard having to go away. I know, because I had to go away to Belgium, which is much farther away than London. Besides, think of the sights you'll see! All those ripping theatres and restaurants. They're nearly as nice as those at Brussels, where Mother and I used to go and eat such ripping confiserie. Besides, it's not for ever, you know."

Willie wondered how many theatres and restaurants he would be able to visit on the forty pounds that the Moon Fire Office proposed to dole him for a year's work. Certainly there was an annual rise of ten pounds in these wages, but as his father had given him to understand that he would have to buy his own season ticket, his own clothes, provide for his own hobbies, and contribute half a crown a week towards his board, laundry, and lodging, it would possibly not go far. But these speculations were obliterated at their conception by a piercing anguish that was hardly bearable. Suddenly he asked Elsie if she would meet him that night by the haystack in the corner of the field.

"About half-past nine," he urged. "I've got such a ripping surprise on, just for you and me on our last evening. You'll have to sneak out. It will be such a wheeze. You will come, won't you?"

"Half-past nine! I don't think I dare."

"Oh do, Elsie, please."

"But how about Mary. Can she come too?"

"She can come another day. It's for you and me, to-night. Just ourselves." He spoke more confidently.

"But supposing Mother and Father find out?"

"They won't. Of course they won't. But if they do you must say you're going into the garden to see the moon."

"But there isn't any moon, is there?"

"Of course there is a moon. Haven't you observed the nights lately, and the moon getting fuller and fuller? It rises to-night, so my chart says, soon after eleven o'clock."

"Your chart?"

"I made a chart of Rookhurst, putting in all the footpaths, the main rabbit-runs, stiles, footpaths, spinneys, streams, and where the more important nests were this year. Also the dispositions of the battle during its various phases, and a separate chart showing the stars at night. By a new trigonometrical apparatus I've invented I can tell the time by the stars—not exactly, of course, but correct within an hour or so."

"How wonderful! Do you know, Willie, while you were telling me of that you looked ripping. Your face and eyes, I mean. Why can't you always be like that? Father says that useful work is a sure cure for morbidness. That's why he, as an artist, has succeeded. Why, you might patent your invention and it might revolverise the world's shipping, and make your fortune!"

"But I don't want a fortune, and I don't want to spend my life in constant work like one of those American multi-millionaires who can't eat a meal without pain. After all we've only got one life, haven't we? From what I've seen in nature I know the wild birds are pretty happy, not for a fortnight a year, but all the time. But I suppose you think I'm sappy?"

"Oh no, I don't think that, but I think that if you had read a bit more you would not talk like that. What, for instance, do you know of the Roman Catholic Religion?"

"They burned people, didn't they?"

"That's silly to say that, because it happened long ago. Through religion we can live on for ever."

Willie thought of the tumulus by which he had sat and comprehended the two thousand years that had passed since its warrior had been interred. In the midst of sunshine and

the wind in the grasses the passing of those centuries had seemed not to have been : yet here was Elsie inferring that he should read more about the Roman Catholic religion.

"Through religion we can obtain immortal life," she urged.

"Which religion ? "

"The Christian religion, of course."

"Are you trying to convert me ? Because if you are, I tell you I don't believe in religion."

"Willie," replied the girl in a hushed voice, "you are wicked. You are an Atheist. And that's worse than a Jew."

"But some Jews are awfully decent. And I'm not an Atheist."

"What are you, then ? "

"I don't know. At any rate I'm not a hypocrite. Nor am I afraid of the test of truth. It's because people have funk'd the truth that so much misery has been in the past. That's why they say everything is ordained, and happens for the best."

"We must have faith."

"Faith," he jeered, "you mean illusion. Why, everything in nature disproves the idea that all things happen for the best. It's making the best of a bad job to give it up and say that everything is ordained."

"You've been reading wicked books. You're getting morbid again."

"*You* say so. I say I'm seeking for truth. And I know I've found it."

"Where ? "

"In love," Willie ecstatically replied, his timidity and fear of what she would think being for the moment forgotten.

"God is love," asserted Elsie, and Willie said nothing.

Their theological discussion seemed to have reached no definite conclusion ; but it emboldened Willie and made him feel a splendid heretic. He was half afraid of what he had said, feeling very much as a caterpillar must feel when it is spinning its cocoon and has so definitely terminated one stage of its existence.

"Won't you come in and see Charlie?" asked Elsie, after a minute of gentle oscillation in the sagging hammock which at each swing gave Willie a gentle scrape upon an exposed root beneath.

"No, I must go now."

"So soon? But you've only just come."

"I've got to say good-bye to a lot of people. I say, how about to-night?"

Elsie demurred, but eventually agreed to meet him in the gloaming by the haystack at half-past nine.

Willie hastened away from The Firs and went towards Rookhurst. Each step farther from the house rendered lighter the oppression of his spirit, and he had walked half a mile when the last of his burden was removed by the golden shovels of the sun. He passed the quarry and looked in, but the cottage of Tom Sorrell was locked up, the kilns cold and deserted. The bleached grasses guarded flowers of chicory that everywhere he looked seemed like flecks of the sky fallen to earth. A hare bounded from its chalky form in a tussock as he peered over one edge of the pit, and rushed up the opposite slope, disappearing into the wilderness of ancient teasles, thistles, and burnet-rose briars in the grass. Evidently the quarry had been without human molestation for some days, he thought, otherwise the hare would not have chosen it as a place to muse away the long hours of day.

Willie left the main road, deciding to take one last look at the old mill, whose wheel of elmwood so often in the past had been a companion of dream. As he approached the stream in the valley a faint thunder merging with the tranquillity of the summer eve told him that Andrew the miller was feeding the hoppers. Willie walked beside the ebbing millpond and saw at its rushy verge the body of a dog with a rusty pot attached to its tail. Its legs were hidden in the ooze that seemed wishful of taking the whole corpse into its uncaring embrace of decay. There was something familiar in the coat that never heaved in breathing, something seen before in the mudlogged tail that never more would wag in friendship or stiffen in challenge. Willie

wondered what Bill Nye in the Infirmary at Colham would think if he knew that his dog had come to this woeful end : a death so unnecessary had he but thought to give Tiger an occasional meal and a box of straw in the disused summer-house at the end of the garden. The clownish mongrel of former days had become in his eyes a symbol of fidelity ever since its vigil in the root-cave—yet he had neglected its welfare. Of what use were remorseful tears now that the mongrel would know no further ecstasy of service or misery of desertion ?

With his hazel stick Willie sorrowfully touched the drowned head. "Good-bye, Tiger," he muttered.

A flume broke over the hatch of the penstock, where the water fell on the wheel. Cool gushings leapt from trough to trough, and jets of silver spurted from the patched planking, refreshing continually the green of the mosses and the harts-tongue ferns. Slowly revolved the ancient wheel throwing fanwise from its trundling rim a shower of drops ever stealing the sunlight. Blue singing swallows passed through the spray, and to them all Willie whispered farewell. Then in the maple branches above the mill alighted a flock of starlings already gathered for their autumnal expeditions from boggy meadow to upland pasture, upland pasture to fallow field. Immediately thousands of birds began to wheeze, whistle, chuckle, mimic, twitter, pipe, croak, rattle, whine, and troll a jumbled parody of all the songbirds' notes heard throughout summer. They flapped their wings, they swelled their throats, they raised their greasy crests, they puffed the feathers of their breasts like tawdry boas, all the while squirting their communal rhapsody into the air. This was the first grand performance of the squitchedy din, although for months little groups had been practising upon the chimney tuns, on the roofs of cattle shippen, and on the tower of the church. Willie left as they began to preen their feathers, for he was standing directly under the perched concourse and had not forgotten what old Granfer Will'um, who used to sit outside the inn all day, had often told him : that a flea fell from a stare each time it shook its wings.

As he passed round the mill the thunder of the runner-stone on the bed-stone became greater. Old Andrew the miller was leaning over the door, his hair and beard white with flour dust, and talking to Dolly. Willie stopped to speak to them. Dolly said that she was leaving Rookhurst very soon, and going away. He asked her where she was going, but Dolly replied vaguely that she did not know—she could get work somewhere, she supposed. Bill Nye had told her in the Infirmary last Friday that he would like to go with her when he was better: one day, perhaps, they would go. Had Willie, she inquired, seen Bill Nye's puppy-dog, because he were worried about it, and didn't want it to turn into a rough 'un. Willie shook his head, hastily said good-bye to Dolly and the miller, and turned back towards Skirr Farm.

On the road he met Mr. Rattlethrough, with two small boys. Shyly Willie raised his cap. He was surprised to see him and felt a curious pleasure. Mr. Rattlethrough raised his straw hat to him, and the small boys did likewise. He beamed upon Willie.

"Well, Maddison, this is a . . . er . . . surprise. I might say, yes, a pleasurable surprise. You have not left for London yet?"

"No, Sir."

"Ah, yes. You live here? A delightful country. I am takin' my two small sons to view the . . . er . . . the old mill. A relic of old England."

"Yes, Sir."

"I am hopin' they will become interested in natural history, Maddison. I feel very strongly about the value of nature study for education—the real education. Well, my boy, I won't keep you. I wish you every success. And if I was rather a . . . er . . . let me see . . . at Bedbridge one would have said . . . er . . . terror . . . yes, if I seemed a terror, remember that generations of boys who . . . er . . . won't learn, are . . . er . . . rather distractin'."

He seemed so earnest that Willie felt a sudden tremendous liking for him.

"Yes, Sir," he said; "boys must be devilish things to

teach, and I suppose masters have to repeat the same lessons for ever."

"Already the Old Colhamean has an altered perspective! One changes, Maddison. Well, I must be off. You should do well, my dear boy. The Head Master agreed with me when you left that you had the power to do brilliantly!"

"Me, Sir?" gaped Willie.

"Yes," laughed Ratpoison. They shook hands and parted.

"I've been looking for you," said Jack, whom he encountered near the big wheatfield. "I've been up to your house. I say, your Guv'nor's got a ripping spread for you. When I asked if you were there he replied in that aloof voice of his that he didn't know, but he expected you were somewhere about. I saw a big green bottle of stuff on the table with gold foil round the neck. I expect it's some decent drink like Cherry Hops or Orangecreamade, or one of those new Hotdrinks at Krumm's. Don't you think you ought to go, and not come home with me?"

"If you don't want me I'll go."

"Don't misunderstand me, Willie. I want you very much, you must know that. Only I thought——"

"But isn't this my last day? Surely I can please myself, even if I am to be pitchforked into a strange country. I am no longer a schoolboy, and as I'm grown up I can jolly well please myself. You know as well as I do that my father and I don't get on at all well. You may say that it is my fault, but I can say: Who was in the world first, he or me? Who was big and who was little. Oh, don't let's rake up the past. Wouldn't you really like me to be with you?"

"Of course."

"Well then enough said. I shall have to leave you at nine, but I'll see you to-morrow morning before I go. Bony's going to be at Colham Station, so is Rupert, Mac, Yeates, and Swann."

"It's rotten you're going," lamented Jack moodily, for the twentieth time.

ADVENTURE WITH THE ADORED

AFTER supper the minutes seemed to drag interminably. The roseal colour of sunset merged into a purpurate hue that stained the landscape seen through the western casement as a child's mouth is stained by blackberries. Then the little shy maid, her right stocking furled about her boot, came into the room and smilingly placed a hand-lamp upon the side table. In a soft burring voice she asked permission to light the lamp swung under the beam supporting the blunderbusses. This seemed to take an enormous time, while every one stared dispassionately at her. At last the orange shine was steady behind the glass, and the door closed behind her. Willie cleared his throat, coughed, and drained once more the dregs of his cocoa. The grandfather clock in the corner buzzed with irritating hastelessness, its buzz droned into a whirr, which in turn became absorbed in nine weary frangings. Willie exclaimed that it was time to go. There were protestations from every one, until he mentioned that he must see his father, which met with agreement.

The little maid sat in the kitchen through which he had to pass. She smiled at Willie, and asked him if he had heard how Bill Nye in the Spike was a-getting on. Willie replied that he was much better, and as he walked into darkness he wondered amusedly if Bill Nye had inspired an affection as years ago Jim Holloman had in the young Dolly. He reflected on this as he pushed forward into the night unlit by a single star: it augmented his feeling of age to observe with kindly tolerance the Dawn of Love in some one so utterly inexperienced. Perhaps his own son—Willie blushed in the dark with foolishness at the idea—would one day fall in love even as himself had done, but he would not laugh at the little fellow. He would instead talk with him about Ideals, the difference between Artistic Creators, Artistic Appreciators, and Rank Materialists.

Progress towards the haystack tryst was falteringly made as not even the hedgerows were in outline against the night's

black armour. He decided that it was more romantic to reach her house by the fields, and quitted the uncertain roadway for the friendly meadow. After breaking through several hedgerows and falling into the brook in his haste, a yellow glimmer before him told that he had held to the right direction. Steadily he went forward, his eyes intent on the beacon. The glimmer became a shine which so dazzled his unwavering sight that he blundered into the wire fence and into tall rank nettles before he was aware of his nearness. He scrambled up and crept in the direction of the open window, through which was borne a divine music. He dared not to approach nearer lest his presence be detected and the occupants suspect he had been eavesdropping. The melody was in a sad key that seemed specially played for his own mood. Now the musician was repeating the refrain, and singing in a low sweet voice that gave to his ravished ear every word.

*O take me to thy bosom fair,
O cover me with thy golden hair,
Elëanore.*

When the music ceased the voice of his Ideal said :—

“That’s jolly fine, I say, only it’s a bit morbid. Why do you always play sad pieces of music. Isn’t there enough sadness in the world already.”

“It’s music,” replied the voice of Mary—she spoke very fiercely, Willie thought. “Music! You should hear Diana Shelley play! All lovely things are sad.”

“You and Willie would make a fine pair, I say. You’d be able to weep out your woes on each other’s shoulders. Willie I’m sure would shed tears.”

Eavesdropping or not, Willie felt that he had to creep nearer lest anything be missed; it seemed that he had a heavy weight attached to his heart as he made laborious progress over the dewy lawn.

“Oh, shut up, Elsie, for goodness’ sake.”

“I believe you’re rather keen yourself on Willie. You’re silly enough to be. But Father says that all artistic people are unstable when they are young.”

Mary did not answer, but commenced to play. The music enthralled Willie, giving him a vision before which he lay down and hugged the moist earth in rapture.

"Do you like that?" challenged Mary, when it was ended.

"It's not bad, but there was no tune."

"No tune!" sneered the other girl, "that's one of the rippingest things in the world. 'Hymn to the Sun,' from *Le Coq d'or*. No tune! Poor old Elsie!"

"Well, don't be nasty over it. I can't appreciate music like you if I can't, can I?" complained Elsie. Willie, in rapt contemplation of her profile, suddenly covered his eyes with his hands.

"I'm sorry I was rotten to you," replied Mary in an altered voice. Peering upwards, Willie saw that her arm was around the shoulders of Elsie. "Only do be nice to him," she pleaded.

Willie lay on the ground again, and clutched the turf wildly. He realised that Elsie in secret laughed at him. He realised that on those occasions when she had tried to cheer him up, she had done so because she thought him weak. He realised that her behaviour was not due to maiden waywardness, but to absolute distaste. She must be disappointed in him. Perhaps, after all, his mind was unhealthy. A hundred sleepless nights, a hundred fragile dreams, a hundred gray mornings of misery, and again, as many of joy and hope—and all the while he had been deluding himself. His Ideal was shattered, his heart was broken. What need was there to go now to London, what was there remaining but an empty life that the sooner ended, the better.

"Is that you, Willie?" he heard her voice inquiring. Looking up, he saw that she was darkly framed in the yellow space of window.

"Yes," he whispered from the ground.

"I thought I heard a noise. I'm just coming. It's all right. Mother and Father are at the Vicarage. Shan't be half a mo!"

"But if she can speak like that," he told himself, "surely there is hope? She wants to come. Of course, what a fool

I was. She doesn't want that girl Mary to know of her love for me. Her voice was quite eager. Shall I ask her to be secretly engaged? Oh, but I dare not. I wonder if she heard my heart thumping just now?"

Willie walked round to the haystack. The wind had folded its wings, and the night was silent. She did not come, and Willie was soon profoundly apprehensive that she had gone to bed and forgotten about him. He crept round to the lighted window. Peering in he saw that only Mary was in the room, so he edged away from its betraying patch of light.

"Wherever have you been," she demanded suddenly from the murk near the walnut tree. "I've been in and out twice."

"I've been by the haystack."

"Isn't it dark? I can't see an inch in front of my nose. Where are we going?"

"Ah, you leave that to me. You see, it's a fine thing I've prepared."

"It isn't very far, I hope. The grass is rather wet."

"Oh, but you will love the sound of your feet in the grass. I felt coming here as though I were walking among the stars."

"Pouff, you silly, there aren't any! Why, your sleeve is all wet. Where have you been?"

"I fell in the brook."

"Ah, you've been letting your moods overcome you again, you silly boy!"

This remark dampened his ardour more effectively than his sobbled clothes and squelching boots. Warily they went down the pathway, stumbling several times, and on each occasion Elsie made a petulant protest against the expedition, calling from Willie a humble apology for the absence of the moon and stars, and repeated hope that they would soon be there.

Because his Ideal with her hand touching so lightly his sleeve was with him on this night of nights, a godlike rapture swelled in his heart. How beautifully their footsteps were in time on the road, how warm was her elbow when it touched

his arm, how her eyes must be shining like the stars now smudged by the gross clouds of earth. What a craven he had been to doubt her love—as the stars were unchanged behind those gross clouds, so her soul was immutable by the clouds of his grosser self.

"Elsie, I have to beg your pardon. I am a low sort of fellow."

"What have you been doing now. Stealing our apples? If so, you'll get a pain, because they aren't ripe. Mary had an awful one yesterday."

"No, it's not that," he hastened to correct, "it's something much more important. I humbly beg your pardon for the vile thoughts I had about you."

She squeezed his arm.

"What thoughts have you had about me? Come, tell me. I shan't be offended."

"Oh, but you will, you will. I daren't tell you——"

"Your arm's trembling, Willie. Do tell me, there's a dear!"

At this intimate address Willie nearly choked with joy. Nothing would do, he thought, but a complete and humble apology. With his idea swelling in his heart he stopped and knelt down, meaning to kiss her foot. He said nothing of his intention, with the result that Elsie stumbled over his bowed head and was nearly stretched out on the roadway.

"Whatever are you up to?" she complained, "you nearly knocked me over."

"Forgive me, please forgive me," he pleaded, hating himself for his clumsiness. "I meant to kiss your foot."

"Willie," said Elsie, very still in the darkness, "have you been drinking in a low pub?"

"No, oh no, only a cup of cocoa at Jack's. Really, I swear I never drink any beer. Why, I haven't been home since breakfast."

"You haven't?"

"No."

"Well, I think you ought to be ashamed of yourself. You're absolutely heartless. Aren't you?"

"Oh, yes," he agreed in a low voice; "oh, yes, I suppose so."

"You ought to go home this minute."

Willie, hearing the finality in her tone, realised that he must say something desperately sufficient otherwise swift tragedy would be upon him.

"But I'll see him to-morrow. Oh, Elsie, can't you understand how I have dreamed of being alone with you?"

"But you didn't come to tea, when you were asked."

"Charlie was asked too."

"Well, and why not? You are very rude to him. You forget he's my friend, who's going up to Oxford very shortly. Surely you aren't jealous of him, because you're not going to the Varsity?"

Willie said nothing, fearful lest his voice would break.

Yet she spoke rather as though she desired him to admit that he was jealous, Willie convinced himself. Could it be that her mood was merely the contrariness that possessed all girls when they secretly liked a fellow. Perhaps it was the instinct of the pursued to pretend indifference: surely he had read that somewhere in a book: the man was the hunter, and the woman was the hunted, and she enjoyed it.

Willie swallowed, and repeated boldly that he was jealous.

"I think I shall go home," suggested his Ideal, loosening her arm from his. "And you had better, too. You want to put your feet in hot water and mustard."

Willie groaned. "We're nearly there. Please come, please. Will you, please? Please do."

"Only for a little while then!"

He secretly congratulated himself at the success of his theory. The hunted was yielding, although she still feigned a casual reluctance. He wondered if he was expected to kiss her, but the idea of such sacrilege made his teeth chatter; he clenched them lest she might insist upon his going home for the mustard bath—she must love him, to think so of his welfare. Oh, never in the world had there been a maiden like her.

The night seemed more abysmally dark when they reached Skirr Farm. Willie found the ladder in position, and clambered up.

"Am I expected to climb up there?" complained Elsie in what seemed a very loud voice.

"Shus-s-sh," he called down in agony, "they'll hear!"

The window was open about half a foot, and all his heavings and strainings failed to move it. The sash must be hopelessly jambed. He strained again, but it was immovable.

"Here, I votes we go home," decided Elsie from below.

Willie's answer was to push with his shoulder at the centre of the window. The rotten woodwork yielded, and a chime of broken glass came from inside the room. Again and again he stabbed with his elbow, till the entrance was clear.

"Come on," he exalted, "I've done it. I'll get in, and help you."

Elsie came up the ladder protesting at every rung its imminent collapse. Willie said that it had borne him easily enough, and she replied that she was not a skeleton, a remark that precipitated him into an agony of self-consciousness. This precipitate was soon dissolved, however, when he lifted her safely to the floor without sagging completely at the knees. As they walked on the boards there was a sound as of nutshells being crushed.

"Who's been eating nuts up here?" she asked.

Willie lit a candle, and immediately a rat scampered away.

"Oh, look," cried Elsie, clutching him; "oh, look! its green eyes are staring at us. They'll bite our throats."

"I'll show um," growled Willie, picking up a tied bundle of magazines and hurling it at the twin pricks of baleful glare. The missile crashed into a case of stuffed birds, and the candle went out, while other rats scurried away.

He groped for the candle desperately, for Elsie was sure she smelt something burning. The surprise that he had so longed for was a disaster. Willie rekindled the insignificant flame by whose light bending in the draughty night air several cockroaches were seen to be crawling over the floor. Some already were squashed.

"I'm going," decided Elsie; "it's a terrible place you've brought me to. Oh, dear, I think I've got a bat in my hair. They suck your blood, too! Take it out, take it out!!"

"It's a moth," Willie assured her. "Oh, be quiet, or you'll wake them all up."

"I don't care, I want to go home."

"Elsie, I swear it isn't a bat! Look, it's only a daddi-longlegs." On the floor the blood dripped from his cut elbow, but Elsie did not hear.

"I don't really care what it is," she protested, calm again, "but I know that I'm not going to stop here any more."

"Oh, if only you would. Listen, I've got cakes, and sandwiches, and four pastys, two bottles of father's claret half filled up with water, some lemonade, six sausage rolls each, and——"

"I'm not hungry, thank you. I'm going home."

Willie groaned, and prayed hard to himself that he would not burst into tears. He made another appeal, this time to the memory of happy days gone by, but Elsie was half-way out of the window and complaining that she would fall.

The walk back was made in silence. Elsie was the first to speak, pressing his bleeding arm and saying that she was awfully sorry to spoil his picnic, but really she ought not to have come.

"Now if it had been somewhere sensible, Willie, it might have been different. Anywhere but up in that dirty, rat-eaten old loft. Whatever made you choose such a place."

"It's a place sacred in my memory, because of old times," he said in a wavering and low voice.

She did not reply.

Willie's heart started to romp. Several times, as the distance to her house became shorter and shorter and shorter, he opened his mouth to ask the dread question, but no sound issued forth. Once he tugged at her sleeve, and she inquired if he felt ill. They seemed to be rushing towards her gate, the light in a top window was describing irregular arcs in the darkness. A wind was moving in the hedges. Outside the gate he held her sleeve and from far away he heard an unfamiliar hoarse voice saying:—

"Elsie, this can't go on any longer."

O, never had she appeared so calm and remote from him as from her lips came the insistent,

"What can't go on?"

"This—this terrible business. I—I, Oh, I've never been so bad before, so unhappy at night, I mean. It can't go on, it can't! I shall die!"

Again the calm, the merciless, the far-away repetition,

"What can't go on?"

"Oh, this between us. You know. This—this——"

"This what?" She waited, quite still. The black earth seemed spinning round him. "This what? Tell me."

"Elsie," he gasped, "Elsie, don't you know I love you?"

Would she never answer, would she never answer?

"I thought all that was ended. We aren't children any longer, are we? I'm sorry, old Willie. So you love me, do you. Very much? I'm sorry, but——"

"Don't be sorry," he gasped, "don't be sorry. It's ended. Ha ha. Yes, it's ended. Let me die. Then you *don't* love me!"

"No. But how much do you love me?"

"It's ended," he moaned, wondering if he would go mad immediately, "my dream is over. I beg your pardon, Elsie. Don't tell any one, will you? Oh, please promise you won't!"

"All right."

"Tell me one thing, before I pass out of your life for ever. Are you engaged to Charlie, secretly?"

"No, of course not! I'm not engaged to any one."

"Thank you. I apologise for asking you. It's final, I suppose. You won't marry me? Not now, I mean, but in the years to come. Oh, God, I haven't even a photo of you. I've calculated that when I'm forty I shall be earning two hundred and sixty pounds a year at the Moon Insurance Company. What am I saying? I'm mad! Mad!! Do you hear? Ha ha. I shall earn *no* money from the Moon. *For there is no need now to worry about the future.*"

His hollow accent made her exclaim, "Oh, Willie, what do you mean?"

"Time will show," he said tragically, "now I must go. Once more, I apologise for troubling you. I beg your pardon. I'm sorry. It will not occur again. Never again. Good-bye,

Elsie. I shall always keep your image in my heart. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," the quiet voice called as she walked up the path, "don't take it too hard."

"Good-bye," Willie moaned, "Elsie, Elsie!"

When she had gone he felt he must rush after her, and implore her to love him. The wind was rising, but no stars shone. Then he noticed a glow-worm that with melancholy gleam was creeping among the rootlets at his feet. He knelt down and took it on the palm of his hand, thinking that he was the loneliest creature in the whole sad world. Into that world he would go, alone and unfriended, yet bearing in his heart her memory for ever. He placed the slow pilgrim under the hedge once more, and lay beside it. Patiently in the night the glow-worm wandered with its green lanthorne, never heeding the boy who sobbed his woe to the grasses withered at the roadside.

NOCTURNE

THE liquid call of a curlew made Willie raise his head and regard the sky through his tears. Wind-disquieted stars were afflicker. He stood up, and looked towards the eastern horizon hung with a tawny glow. Slowly the umbered moon lifted above the beech forest, like a shield forged in fire and slowly cooling, a red-smoky dross about its face. The grasshoppers that till now had been silent began their songs as the darkness yielded to a dusk softly luminous.

To Willie time had no significance, his home was of no account. He only knew that for him nothing mattered any more. Better if the flames had consumed his heart that night years ago when they had resolved the body of Jim into irreclaimable ash, freeing his spirit for the wind and the rain. How well he could appreciate now the glory of that passing at the supreme moment of life, when the love of earth and the love of maid were one together. For Jim there would be no disillusion, no agony of heartbreak. Was that stir of wind in the hedge nothing more than wandering air :

why was his back athrill and himself glancing awesomely over his shoulder as though to commune with a mystic visitant. In a near field a wakened sheep coughed dryly, but there was something more than earthly stir or ruinous light of moon to account for this feeling so apart from life.

Without a backward look at the house Willie went down the road, his steps steady, quitting it for the fields when he deemed he had gone beyond sound of footfall. He must walk till day should bring some assuagement to the grief that had frozen alike both restraint and abandon. His brain was cold and calm and clear as the bluish-white star immediately over his head, lying centrally in the silver stain of the Milky Way. The million wheeling stars rendered puny the grief of one human being. Though love was gone from his life, though the land he loved would know him no more, yet still he might watch the sky. He would be proud, and know henceforward the stars: he would be proud—but why were the tears still running down his cheeks.

“My heart is breaking,” he thought.

Swiftly he went towards the big wheatfield and the spinney that was an old friend. Once he paused, sensing rather than hearing the noise of footfalls pursuing. But only the wild far cry of a migrating bird came to his ear, so he walked on, swiftly as before, guided himself by the constellation of Cygnus the Swan. To the north of the five stars he recognised Cassiopœia, the Lady of the Chair, seen from his pillow during many summer nights. Farther north was Perseus, who had rescued the daughter of Cassiopœia from the sea-monster sent by Neptune: Andromeda the beautiful was now for ever in heaven with her hero.

All the bright company was for him that night. Arcturus was brilliant over the downs, lancing a ray of blue then flaring with sudden crimson. Aldebaran glowed low in the east, near Capella, a sulphur star that was in the night sky throughout the year, never setting. All the starry hosts were his for evermore. He would purify his heart of human love and weakness, he would lift his heart even above the flowers and the birds, and cloister it high above life. He would be proud.

"But you're crying, you know, man," he said to the sky, and looked with misty sight for Spica Virginis, his own sacred star.

Along the path through the whispering corn to the spinney he walked, desiring to be among its lonely trees. He would keep vigil this night by the shelter: and in the morning he would go home with no expression on his face, like an aristocrat in a tumbril being jolted to execution.

The moon was transmuted to pale gold, and through the summer vapours it loomed big and solemn. Its serene loitering to the higher solitudes released it from earthly taint and the dislustre fell away. The trees of the spinney hid it from Willie's sight as he approached the ancient home of the crowstarvers. When once more he was walking into its light, he noticed that some grotesque thing was against the circle of the moon. The apparition did not move. Two horns curved upwards from its head, black in silhouette with monstrous ears below, and a lean face which was given a golden fringe of hair.

"I knew you'd come," said a gasping voice.

"Jack? Dear old boy, how did you get here? Oh, I am so glad to see you. Where are you. I'm nearly dead. What's that awful thing up there? Oh, I have such a lot to tell you. Jack, Jack, don't desert me ever, will you? Be my friend, Jack. If ever I needed a friend it is now."

"I've been running to get here first," his friend panted. "I followed you after you left at supper, but I lost you at Norman's. I hared off home, and found the windy broken and no food eaten. I guessed something had happened. I rushed up here, thinking you would change your mind, and found only this old goat. Pouff, I'm nearly blown. I've only just arrived. This is the second time I've come here to-night. This goat must have strayed here to find Bill Nye, who I bet used to milk it. It's Turney's, I believe. Feel her, isn't she warm. Let's build a fire, what say? Well, I rushed back agen, and heard you talking outside her house. I guessed what happened. Dear old fellow, remember I'm always your friend, whatever happens. I know I'm a fool, but I'd die for you. Dam. Lend me a handkerchief, will

you? I'm soppy to-night. We're both soppy. Good lord, Willie. Where did all the blood come from on your arm? Oh, Willie, it's all cut and smashed!"

"'Snothing," said Willie.

"I'll bind it up when we get a fire going, shall I?"

"Just as you like, Jack," agreed Willie in a sad voice.

"Rightho," said Jack gently, "and in a sack I brought the grub you did not eat. You don't mind, do you?"

"You've got the grub? Splendid. It's like old times."

"Rather!"

"I'll milk this blinking goat! Carrambo!"

"Hurrray, that's the idea. Now you're talking!"

"We'll build a devil of a great big fire. The Colham Fire Brigade will send its chestnut-barrow to put it out. Hurrray!"

"Dam everybody, eh, Willie?"

"Yes, dam every one except us. Get more sticks. Get some logs. We'll sleep in the shelter! Did you bring the wine?"

"One bottle."

"Give it me. I'm wounded! I'm goin' to get dam hellfirey drunk to-night."

"I feel dam drunk already. Isn't it a ripping last night?"

"Yes," yelled Willie in his loudest voice. "I don't care for any one. Carrambo. Can you hear me?"

"Yes, I can hear you," bawled Jack, while about a dozen dogs in the village below commenced to bay dismally.

They lit the fire, and soon the spinney lost its pale shade and seemed to dance in the flamelight. The cheerful warmth, the crackle of branches, the swirl of sparks, the wine and the food, the comforting tobacco, caused the wildest spirits in Willie. Because himself had suggested it, he milked the goat into Jack's cap, and they poured out a libation to the gods. Afterwards when Jack put it on his head white trickles crept down his ears and cheeks, which dried in the heat and gave him a mildewed appearance. They both vowed that they were drunk, and incapable of standing on their legs. By way of demonstration they staggered about

and rolled into one another, and into the goat, who resenting this intrusion upon its slumber, butted Willie gravely. By the swift accuracy of his flight it appeared that the grape fumes had not the hold upon his brain as he had hitherto declared. They rolled on the pine spindles, aching with laughter.

The moon was now a silver bubble in a pool of aquamarine. In flame and spark the bonfire blazed. More faggots were tossed on. A fox yapped at the light from the distant coppice, a hedgehog paused in its rustling search to listen. They tapped out the cherrywoods and lit a third bowlful, smoking with intervals of silence increasing. Once Jack yawned, and Willie thought of the soothing security of slumber. His tragedy seemed a dream, to-morrow appeared as something that could never obtrude upon the present. Jack went away for more sticks, and called sleepily from one end that none were to be found. Willie, crouching by the fire, shivered and yawned again. His pipe was out. Midnight had long passed, the moon of late summer was austere pale. Nocturnal birdsong was finished for the year: soon to the south the swifts would bravely fly: the mute nightingales shortly would go without linger: he too would make a brave departure.

Jack came back and stared at the fiery shell from which darted a tiny flame.

"Shall we go home, man?" he suggested.

"Just a minute, Jack. I want to go alone to the edge. I shall not be long. You understand, old friend?"

The old friend nodded.

Willie walked into the shortening and ghostly shadows. At the edge of the spinney he stopped.

"I shall return," he whispered to Aldebaran, fiery above the beech wood. "I shall not forget you, everything I love. I shan't really be in London, only my body. Good-bye, old crowstarvers' spinney, that will never again see Jim and Dolly, little Bill Nye and his mongrel. Good-bye, big wheat-field. Good-bye, brook. Good-bye, owls. Good-bye, dandelions. Good-bye, oddmedodds. Good-bye——"

He leant against a tree, while a flittermouse passed round

his head, squeaking. At last the ruddy star was clear again, and he went back to the waiting friend. Silently and with arms linked they passed down the pathway, leaving behind the wind murmurous in the trees and the silver-swaying wheat.

December, 1920—September, 1921.

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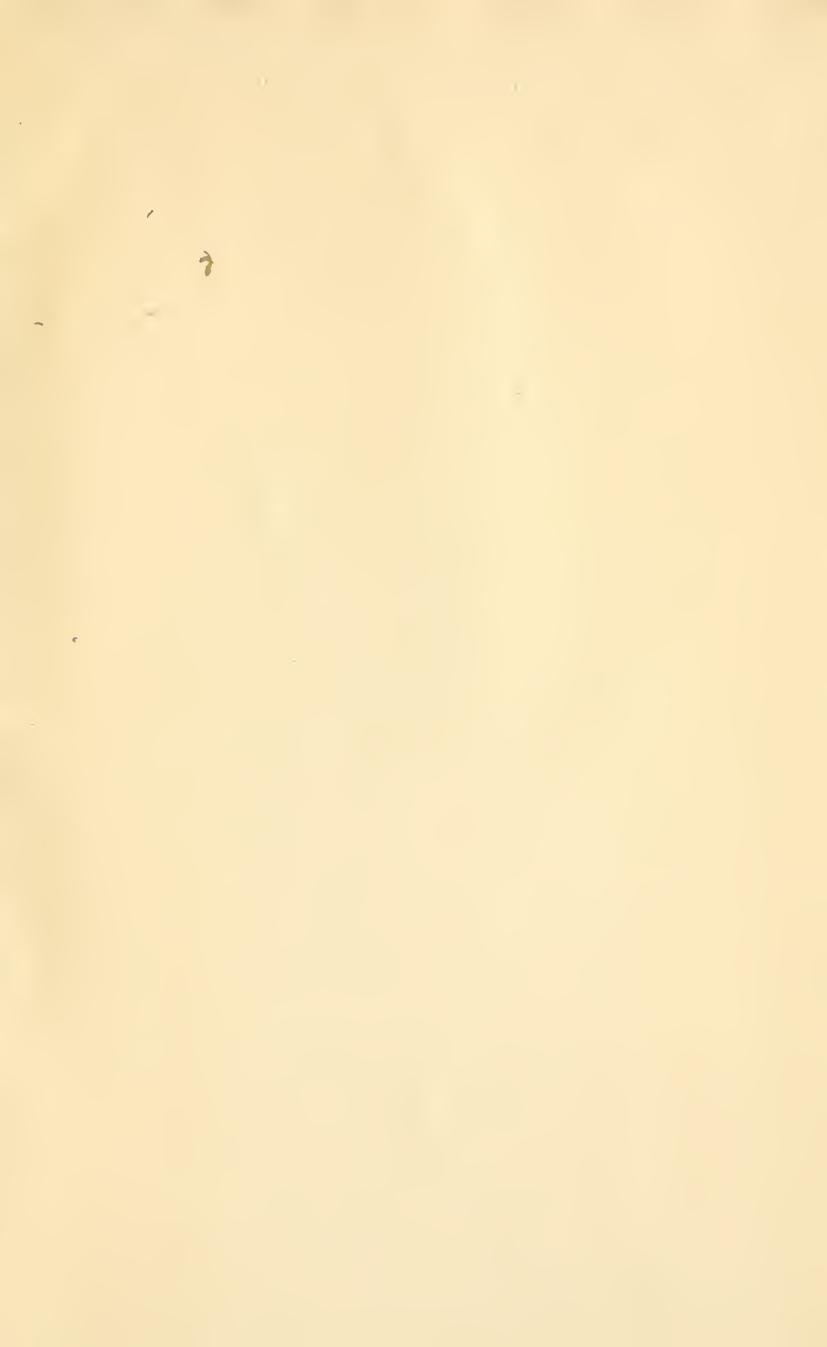
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